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The Biography OF A LOCOMOTIVE

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✓
THE BIOGRAPHY
OF A
LOCOMOTIVE ENGINE.

BY
HENRY FRITH,
*Author of "Under Bayard's Banner," "The Search for the
Talisman," "On the Wings of the Wind," "The Hunting
of the Hydra," "The Opal Mountain," &c. &c.*

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P R E F A C E.

ONE evening in August many years ago—to be accurate, in the year 1856—a rather small boy, for his age, was standing on the platform of the Salt Hill station, near Kingstown, Co. Dublin. A train was approaching bound for the Irish capital; the engine was named *Comet*.

The small boy put a question to the engine-driver when he had stopped the train.

“How far are you goin’?” asked Paddy, in reply.

The lad was not bound for any station; he had come down for information only.

“Jump up along wid me as far as the Rock* then, and ye’ll see theingin.”

The boy gladly complied, and that short run on the *Comet* was the first experience upon a locomotive of the writer of this book.

After that he had many rides with his friend upon the *Comet*; and the Engineering School at old “Trinity” confirmed the taste which had come “by nature” more readily than reading or writing. From that time to the present the study of engines, and the practice of driving them when opportunities

* Local for Black Rock station.

offered, have been pursued, under varying circumstances, in all weathers, in England and Ireland.

In the following pages the outcome of these experiences, in narrative form, will be found—a story of engine-life founded on facts. Some of the incidents are personal, some are facts related to the writer by engine-men and other friends. None is impossible, though the surroundings are imaginary. It has been the author's aim to produce a volume giving to all who like and admire locomotives an insight into their working and use, as well as a glimpse, from the engine itself, of the daily duty of those brave, heroic men, of whose work the public knows so little, and of whose devotion comparatively few readers have sufficient appreciation.

In conclusion, the author wishes to acknowledge the kindness of Mr. Michael Reynolds, who, in past days, gave him the run of his locomotives, and afforded him much information; and to thank Mr. W. Adams for admission, lately, to the London and S. W. Railway Works at Nine Elms.

H. F.

London, August, 1891.

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THE BIOGRAPHY OF A LOCOMOTIVE ENGINE.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE LOCOMOTIVE—ENGINES,
SINGLE AND COUPLED—"POLYPHEMUS" AND
HIS FRIENDS.

TO write the Biography of a Locomotive we must first become acquainted with its birthplace, its bringing up, its first run in "leading strings," technically termed "loose pulleys," its youthful trials, and its adventures, or services, in after years. The intelligent reader will remark the many points of analogy between our human nature and the locomotive; and this without any strained comparisons. But, as there are various classes of locomotives, of a more or less fast mode of life, we must choose the middle-class for our illustration so as to describe the working, nominally with the same engine, of goods and passenger trains. We can thus become acquainted, not only with the business performed by the steady-going plodding "goods" engine, but also with the more "flashy" and gaudy express locomotive, brave in brass work, and green and gold.

The nurseries or cradles of great men are always full of interest to the biographer. So are the cradles or nurseries of the race of giants, the Cyclops, the

Titans, of the locomotive world. These nurseries are prosaically known as "shops," and the erecting-shop may be—and often is—at once the hospital and the birthplace of the engine.

In these erecting-shops we shall find the locomotive in every stage of development, from the frame, or embryo, to the completed machine. To reach this erecting-shed we have passed through a perilous wilderness of lines, of points, and turntables; pervaded by wandering engines of all kinds, careering, with apparent aimlessness, on pleasure bent; but really on active service, whistling in every variety of key to be let out or to pass in. The cheerful "crow" for liberty, the long drawn note for a signal, the sharp acknowledgment "thank you," are all audible.

We have, let us suppose, passed through this wilderness and the graveyard of the engine—the scrap-heap, and the rusted sidings yonder.

We have seen the old, the infirm, the maimed, the halt, the rusted machines; the engines without tenders like birds without tails; the tenders *sans* engines; the ranks of wheels, the masses of rusty iron. The engines are, so to speak, dead and buried; scrap they were, to scrap they have returned; but the same "scrap" will be again purified by fire, and "Resurgam" might be written over the smiths' shops and furnaces! Verily, there is a strange analogy between the human creature and the machine, the intelligent engine and its creator, if we choose to pursue the comparison.

From the almshouse of pauper engines, from the hospital of the locomotive, from the graveyard of our iron horse, let us turn to its birthplace and note its surroundings. In some cases the engines are born, or made, in the hospital, amid the injured and ailing.

Over a deep pit is the infant Hercules, a skeleton of an engine ; but on this frame a great fabric will be reared, and we shall see the gradual growth of our locomotive, which will not be complete until all its five thousand pieces are fixed and in thorough working order. Think of it ! The computation is under the mark. An eminent engineer has stated that in the engine are 5,416 separate pieces, which must be fitted as carefully as the pieces of a watch ! What are these pieces ? in what are they included ?

The boiler, with its tubes, fire-box, smoke-box, chimney, etc. The valves, gauges, and so on.

The machinery, including the eccentrics, cranks, pistons, connecting-rods, cylinders, axles, slide-bars, and expanding gear, levers, etc.

The steam-pipes, furnace, and pumps ; blower, steam-brake, vacuum-brake, injector to supply the boiler with water, and many other appliances made and fitted with mathematical accuracy. These are the principal parts, the details of which would fill several pages of description. The wheels are fitted when the engine is hauled up on end by cranes, like a rearing horse in appearance.

Our engine being finished so far as the machinery is concerned, she is tried in the shops, and, if found to run all right up and down, the "ugly duckling" comes forth a very plain-looking machine, unpainted, smeared here and there with daubs of colour, a decidedly untidy young locomotive full grown, and looking even larger than she really is, and bigger than she will look when dressed in her new coats of paint. The trial trip is then made, a run, perhaps at night when the line is clear, and the unsightly monster, bearing her head-lights, is not perceived distinctly. A rushing, tearing locomotive

is sent flying along the silent iron highways at a speed of perhaps seventy miles an hour ; and if all be not right then, woe to the occupants of the foot-plate !

The trial completed, the intelligent machine is returned to the shops to receive her "lagging." This is a wooden over-garment, or casing, which is fixed by "crinolines," or iron hoops, upon the boiler, and conserves the heat. The covering is then put on, and this outer casing is painted with as many coats as there were colours in Joseph's garment ; the final two coats being those affected by the superintendent—green, chocolate, or a mixture of colours as the case may be. When the body colour, the filling and stopping, and other little attentions have been paid her, our locomotive, painted, burnished, cleaned, and polished, is ready to begin her travels, if a tank engine. If she requires a tender helpmate it is wedded to the engine, a kind of marriage which is seldom dissolved unless one of the two thus united becomes unworthy, or the death of the machine separates them.

This tender is what may be termed the "better half" of the more noble creation—the engine. The latter can run alone, certainly, without a tender, self-contained, quite able to rough it on the track, and willing to do plenty of work. But the tender-less engine cannot go so far, nor so fast, as the great wedded locomotive, whose "better half" assists him with supplies, and keeps up his flagging energy to the last.

Said I not truly, that engines have a great deal of "human nature" about them ?

This tender carries water and coal ; not coal only, as many spectators imagine. Some four or five tons of coal, and a couple of thousand gallons of water,

are the supplies carried to feed the living machine. With this breakfast the *Polyphemus*, if properly attended to, will be able to pull her Majesty's mails at express speed for a very long run.

But as, in the creature world, there are many varieties of people, so in the locomotive world there are many varieties of engines: "single" and "coupled," "simple" and "compound," "inside-cylinder" engines and "outside-cylinder" engines, "tank" engines, and "tender" engines. We must understand the differences before the narrative commences.

A "single" engine—such as is so generally employed on the Great Northern, North Western, and other lines for express traffic—has one large wheel between the two small ones on each side. This wheel is sometimes over eight feet in height—as in the Great Western broad-gauge engines.

A "coupled" engine has two wheels connected by a long bar, or coupling-rod, on each side. This bar works on a crank axle, and gives grip to the wheels, and therefore power of haulage. So a "coupled" engine can pull a heavier load, and at better sustained speed, than a "single" engine, under ordinary circumstances.

Some locomotives have cylinders inside the frames underneath the boiler; some have cylinders outside. These distinctions are obvious. The compound engines may have two or three cylinders. Webb's compounds have three—two "high pressure" and one of "low pressure," the latter being in the front in the centre of the engine, below the smoke-box, which is under the chimney.

Now you understand the different kinds of engines, and will recognise them in the shops, and on the road. You can generally know a three-cylinder

compound engine by the sound of the "exhaust," or the "puffing," which is much more deliberate than the puffs of the simple engine. This is accounted for by the fact that the steam escapes up the chimney only twice in a revolution of the wheels instead of four times, as in the simple engine. If you travel on the North Western Railway you will remark this immediately in Mr. Webb's engines.

A "goods" engine is immediately recognisable by its three coupled wheels on each side. This coupling gives it increased power with a load; but it is not fitted for very rapid travelling, as the machinery might become hot in consequence of the rapid revolutions of the small wheels. There are "express" goods engines, however, having wheels of somewhat greater diameter than coal-train engines, and these travel fast.

A tank engine has no tender. It carries its supplies of coal in a bunker behind the foot-plate, and the water in the tanks outside the boiler, or beneath or at the back of the coals, in the hinder part. These engines do not run long journeys; but they are handy for suburban traffic, and "get away" quickly with a load.

A "light" engine is simply an engine "unattached" —without a train: the epithet has no reference to its weight. I have heard people call "tank" engines "light" engines because they are small, and "goods" engines "luggage" engines—which, like the term "luggage train," is a complete misnomer.

These engines are used as passenger, goods, "bank," or pilot engines. A "pilot" may be the foremost engine of two, or a forerunner to indicate the coming of a royal or special train. A "bank" engine is a railroad "good Samaritan;" it assists

its weaker brethren up steep inclines—known as “banks” by engine-men—and is always ready on emergencies to take an injured friend’s place without reward or thanks. In this particular we may note a difference from the general practice of humanity.

When the locomotive is prepared for business it is in the “running shed” that its driver finds it. Travellers to Victoria (London) on the Brighton Railway have seen and noticed the round engine stables with a number of funnels near Battersca Park. Each engine, when it returns home, is coaled up for next day,* and placed in its proper position within the shed, its chimney under a funnel and standing over a pit from which the interior “motion” (the machinery which moves the engine) may be duly cleaned and examined.

The cleaning is performed by a gang of lads, and entails considerable hard work. The writer has had conversation with young firemen who have emerged from this stage, and has learnt some of the hardships of their lives. They are liable to many accidents in the shed while cleaning. The cold and wet and the terrible draughts in winter affect them seriously. The work is hard, and generally performed during the night. To their efforts the brilliant, natty appearance of the locomotive is due—not to the driver or his fireman.†

The engine, we will imagine, is in its shed. Its name is *Polyphemus*, let us say—but the gender is always feminine. Be the title never so masculine, the engine is “she!” *Hercules* himself, *Cyclops*,

* The coaling-time differs on different lines, but is best done before the engine is cleaned.

† This is the proper term—not “stoker.” A “stoker” fills a similar berth on board a steamship.

locomotive. Different builders have different ideas, and it would be impossible, in such a volume as this, to give all the various types of engine. We have strained our position in running *Polyphemus* with a "goods" train, but he (or she) will do so for the greater simplicity of narrative.

Now, reader, we will go together to the sheds and take notes for our Biography of *Polyphemus*, riding in imagination with his trusty friends, driver Eldred and fireman Ames. Let us peep into the shed first. . . .



CHAPTER II.

IN THE SHED—A RUN WITH A "GOODS"—THE ENGINE-DRIVER'S WARNING.

"FIRE! Look alive there! Fire, Fire!"

It is five o'clock on a fine, albeit rather chilly, summer morning. The engines are in their stalls in proper train order. The "roster" is attended to, and the first required will be ready first, and so on in proper succession. Every engine has its appointed men; they know their engines, and we may almost say the engines know them.

All is quiet in the shed. Suddenly someone who knows the time when the engines must be ready—for there is a "lighting list," or record for duty—shouts "Fire!" No one is alarmed. Those in the shed, the fitters and cleaners, know that the shout comes from the man who is responsible for getting up steam in the engines, *Polyphemus* included. This man is the fire-lighter.

B

The engine is clean. *Polyphemus*, since his arrival on duty from his first run, has been coaled while dirty; and then, rather splashed, and perhaps heated, has been "run in" to the shed where the fitter has examined him, and perhaps his driver has also inspected him. This was *Polyphemus's* first run, and he may feel a little nervous and warm! So the cleaners deal tenderly with him, and the fitters look him over carefully for his "grooming."

"Fire! Come on there!"

There is always a fire burning there—all day and all night—a fine fire. So, at the call of the "lighter" the cleaners appear, and put a certain quantity of live coals into the furnace of *Polyphemus*; and as he has had a good drink of water in his boiler, which has been washed out, he soon begins to steam pleasantly, and to smoke peacefully. The smoke rises up into the still morning air through the funnel in the roof of the shed, and the daily work of our hero is about to commence. But he still stands quietly, motionless in his stall, waiting for the touch of the master-hand.

He has to wait some little time longer, however. Train time is not yet come; an hour has to elapse before the driver will appear, and our "hero" smokes away, the vapour from his morning pipe curling round the chimney. While *Polyphemus* is thus waiting patiently he is by no means unattended to. He is not left entirely to himself; a responsible person keeps him in view, and watches his behaviour.

This is necessary for several reasons. The steam must be kept at proper height, and engines have at times run away by themselves, in consequence of some neglect, and then serious accidents have happened. But in his full-grown youth *Polyphemus* is very steady, and waits patiently for his fireman and driver.

They appear in due time, the fireman first. He examines his steed, and finds it in proper order. The driver arrives later.

"All right, mate?" he asks. "Fine mornin'."

"All right!" replies the fireman, who is sweeping up the foot-plate—for he knows his driver is particular as to coal-dust, and a few bushels have just been added to *Polyphemus's* furnace.

"Seen anything of that party, mate?" asks the driver as he goes, oil-feed in hand, around the engine.

"No," replies his mate. "I don't think he *is* anyone, Bob. No one at all!"

"D'ye mean that I'm not to believe my own senses, mate? Why I saw him plain as I see you. He came across the track by the lattice-bridge, and he held up his hand for me to stop."

"Yes, and we pulled up," replies Ames, who is oiling the tender-brake and couplings. "It's a mighty queer job."

The engine-driver makes no reply. He wipes the nozzle of the oil-can with a piece of waste in his left hand, and proceeds to touch the cranks and fill the siphons.

The incident to which he referred was rather alarming. He and his mate had been running a night trip with "goods" to the same place whither they are this morning bound, and when approaching a certain lattice-bridge, over a small stream on the main line, a man had suddenly leaped out, and waved his hand—a hand without a lamp, but the hand was apparently crimson. The "goods" was quickly pulled up. Driver Eldred got down and advanced to interview the man who had thus stopped his train.

But to his astonishment no one was there!

Annoyed at the trick which had been played, Eldred returned to the engine, put on steam, and on arriving at the next station reported the matter to the agent. The signalmen on each side were ordered to keep a bright look-out, and the matter dropped.

But on the next occasion—this was in the evening on the up journey—the same figure appeared, and again caused the driver to pull up. This pause nearly caused an accident, and did delay the express. So Eldred was “carpeted” and reprimanded for not keeping time, and for “getting in front” of the fast train. Of course his explanation was received with incredulity, and a caution was administered.

Matters were in this condition when Bob Eldred went on passenger traffic, and had no more stops. He has now obtained the new engine, and is about to try her with a fast goods—to run her home with a “pick-up,” and then to go off on his passenger trains again. This is the situation on the morning of our introduction to *Polyphemus*.

Eldred is a cautious man ; so before he “ signs on ” he inspects and studies the Notice Board. On this board the visitor will find recorded some very important items of information—the alterations to the line or signals, repairs, special trains, and “tidal” traffic for the system, and those items of information which refer to his own line. The driver must note them, else he may run over a line under repair, or kill platelayers, or wreck his train ! These instructions mastered, and the train to which he is to be attached ascertained, he mounts his engine, and touches the whistle.

The fireman, who is underneath the *Polyphemus*, scrambles out immediately ; when he has gained the foot-plate, *Polyphemus* is moved, and with a few gentle puffs makes his way from the shed along the line to

the place where his train, already made up by small engines, awaits him. Such a fine engine as our hero will not condescend to such shunting work! He is above soiling his aristocratic machinery and wheels in commonplace work! No; he will pull the trucks as bidden, for obedience is the first duty of a locomotive, as it is stated by the first clause of the Mutiny Act to be that of a soldier; but *Polyphemus* is not intended for such common business. He is "above trade!"

Eldred studies his way-book while his fireman couples up the train, and as soon as he has mastered the "stops" and shunting-places, he whistles joyfully: a kind of crow for liberty, which is understood to mean "Let me out." The signalman understands this appeal; the levers are pulled, the signals drop. *Polyphemus* whistles a sharp acknowledgment, and, urged gently by his driver, pulls at the trucks.

Polyphemus is a little impatient, and tugs rather hard. Bang! bang! go the unwilling waggons, roughly disturbed from their repose in the comfortable siding. They hang back unwillingly, but he will not be denied; he insists, and then, finding all resistance useless, the trucks and waggons start after him obediently in a kind of follow-my-leader.

Polyphemus knows his way about, too. He picks his way amidst the intervening lines, and through the points and switches. If he were of a poetical turn of mind the "monster Polypheme" would break out into poetry in Tennysonian metre, and describe, like the "Brook," how—

"With many a curve our flanges fret,
By many a field and fallow,
And many a switch by pointsmen set,
And greased with oil and tallow!"

The lines seem to kiss each other as the engine brings us on our journey. They run together quickly, as if anxious to meet ; but, like coy lovers, they dart asunder at the first touch, as if alarmed at their own temerity ! Then, alas ! like some lovers, they remain parted, and go their different ways, never more to meet !

But *Polyphemus* and his masters are not sentimental. They glide about, and in and out, crunching and puffing, the unwilling trucks squealing and protesting behind them, and writhing in a long sinuous tail over the lines until the last brake is clear of the yard, and our hero is fairly out on the main line with his load.

Now *Polyphemus* begins to try his paces. Puffing sonorously, yet with a leisurely beat, he goes on ; the driver and fireman silent ; their eyes and ears intent on every spot, and attentive to every sound ; gazing through the glasses of the weather-board ; looking ahead, as hedges fly past and telegraph posts race after each other ; furrows radiate across fields, and banks rise, run alongside, and then fall off in despair of beating our *Polyphemus*, who goes puffing steadily along, the steam expanded, and the regulator nearly fully open, behaving "like an angel," as Eldred remarks to his mate, a good hand with him.

"I can't understand that fellow, mate," he says after a while ; "and the gaffer wouldn't believe me about the red hand."

"And the public wouldn't," replies the fireman, as he handles the shovel.

"The public !" echoes Eldred. "What does the public know or care about the engine-men, or how they get on ! The public ! Why, people often hear, I dare say, a little touch of the whistle when two trains are

passing, just a note, and never know that that note means a touch of sympathy—a friendly nod, as it were, from two drivers or firemen to each other! Then Bill, when he gets home, can tell Tom's missus how he passed him safe and well in the cutting with the down mail. But do the public care? Not they! You see there's a deal of human nature amongst engine-men; and I'm afraid the general public don't much understand or appreciate us! Oh, don't mistake me: there's no grumble in it! We do our duty, and don't ask any favour! But just tell me: when a train comes in safe and sound—a special, maybe, on which the lives of so many depends—does the driver and his mate get any praise? Who goes up and says: 'You ran that bit well,' or 'That's a fine engine,' or 'Thank you'? Not a one hardly! Out they get, off they go; and the men whose eyes and brains, and whose whole minds, have been strained for hours, may go to the . . . running-shed or anywhere else for all the public cares!"

"Ay," replied Ames, who had warmed up to the subject during this indignant harangue, "I've seen many a cabman in the station tipped and thanked for savin' a train in time, and soldiers has medals for their bravery, and other men has 'em for savin' life. But where's the engine-man with a medal for punctuality, for savin' life, or anything?"

"That's true, Dick. Don't we save lives nigh every day? Ain't we more likely to be killed any day than any soldier or sailor? Don't we engine-men save lives—hundreds, maybe, in one second, by presence o' mind, and in great danger of death—and where's *our* Victoria Cross? No; if the public escapes in a train it's all put down to Providence—and quite right; but no one thinks of the levers in the hands of Providence,

the engine-driver and his mate ! . . . Here's Amaden, Dick ; we puts off a couple here. Mind the brake."

Polyphemus stops, shunts the waggons, and continues his journey then more rapidly. He answers to every touch of the firm, steady hand of his master, and, whether the regulator is opened a little now and again, or closed a bit, with the lever notched back a little in the sector, *Polyphemus* is never irresponsible. He runs, or walks, or lets the steam expand, or puffs strongly out in bold blasts up the hill, as required.

Away down the hill, along the level, with steam on to keep the draw on the waggons—for there should be no tugging at the draw-bars, the tension must be continuous!—up the steep incline, and with a scream, a roar, and a rattle through the tunnel, and out again into the sunlight which rests on the green embankment studded with flowers in white and yellow. Then on to the station of Wexthorpe, and beyond it the lattice-bridge where the curious figure has already twice appeared.

"Can ye see anything, Dick ?"

"No, Bob ; there's naught ; the place is quiet and clear."

Eldred utters a short form of thanksgiving, and feeling much relieved when he has passed the bridge in safety, he hums a tune and is ready to volunteer a song when Gaydon's Hill junction and Midthorpe beyond it come in sight after five hours' run.

"I'm glad we're at the end of this bit, Dick ; I ain't what you call superstitious-like, but that figure's in my brain, and I'm just pleased as we're here for awhile."

"Oh, nothin' will happen to us, Bob ; the ingin's all right, and the line ain't crowded. If *you're* gettin'

nervous there's no chance for some of us! Bob Eldred nervous! Well, I declare!"

"It's presentiments—a kind of tell ye what's goin' to happen feeling, Dick. I ain't *afraid*; but when a man has two warnin's and is put out of his turn again on the same road, he begins to put two and two together. There's the signal up; steady, mate!"

Polyphemus draws up, and then pulls all his waggons into the siding from which they will be sorted in proper order. Many have been already brought by other engines, but our hero is standing still after his run, and intently watching the apparently complicated manœuvres of the shunting engines which, in a fussy fashion, are busily engaged in sorting waggons and trucks. Let us briefly describe these operations, while *Polyphemus* rests and is fed.

CHAPTER III.

IN A GOODS-YARD—THE PILOT ENGINE—AN ADVENTURE—"BROKE AWAY!"

THE method of sorting and marshalling goods was as new to *Polyphemus* as it is, probably, to our readers. Everyone knows the appearance of a goods-yard, and everyone has seen trucks flying on apparently aimless errands along the metals, bringing up with a bang against waggons already on the same line. But everyone is not aware how and why these operations are carried on, and what a very important chapter they constitute in the life of a locomotive.

A miscellaneous train of trucks or waggons is on the line, and it is necessary to make them up into

trains for Liverpool or other large towns, and for various places in due order. *Polyphemus* will be attached to one of these "pick up" and shunting trains, and his waggons must be in train order, as nearly as possible sorted ready for delivery, just as a postman sorts his bundles of correspondence before starting on his rounds. The *Polyphemus* is our parcel and package postman; he will call during the evening or night at our town or village, and leave the truck or waggon in a siding for us while we are amusing ourselves, or are fast asleep. He may perhaps wake us or disturb us by banging and whistling, but the noises cannot be helped; and whistles, if they disturb some people's rest, may, and often do, save other people's lives.

The waggons are now ready for sorting. There are quite two dozen lines parallel to each other at the bottom of an incline; and there are sidings and checks, and switches and points to be filled and traversed. A man with a lump of chalk indicates the destinations of the waggons on their sides, and tells another man where they are to go.

A truck is released; the brake is off, and it runs away into one of the twenty-four lines; hardly has it started, and its destination been shouted out, than another follows, and so on, the switch man turning each truck into its proper or approximate line. So all for Manchester go on one of the parallel roads—which in the aggregate are called "gridirons," and can contain a thousand waggons and trucks—those for Leeds on another road, and so on, as quickly as the eye can follow them.

This is plain sailing. Several trucks run down or are shunted by engines at once, so in a few moments perhaps five trains are nearly ready. But the miscel-

laneous trains are more difficult, because they have to be made up in the order of arrival of the "goods" at the different stations. So the truck for the first station will be put in first, and come out last : thus it can be shunted off immediately, without rendering the breaking up of the train necessary, as sometimes occurs at intermediate stations. Then the switch man has a kind of game ; he has to keep in mind the consecutive order of the stations, and put his trucks in other sidings as if he were playing "Patience." Thus, when he pulls some out of other sidings, he can place them in order in one siding in front of the truck first sent down, as may be necessary. Thus his game of "Patience" is quickly over. The waggons are in order ; then the engine is hooked on, and, when the time comes, it starts.

This "sorting and marshalling" of trucks, etc., is exceedingly simple in practice, but sometimes dangerous to "couplers" and "shunters." In large yards a train can be turned in, broken up, sorted, and despatched within fifteen minutes if necessary, so practised are the men and so ingenious the means employed.

Eldred and Ames, whose adventures we shall now chronicle, remained on duty, but in the cabin, while their train was being made ready. Even when it had been made up the starting time had not arrived, and *Polyphemus* pulled the waggons out of the way to be in readiness to go.

"You'll never pull that load, Bob," said an engine-turner to our driver. "The Amaden Bank will settle you to-night !"

"Why to-night ?" inquired Eldred hastily, as he remembered the apparition of the man with the red hand.

"Why, because it's slippery, or will be. There's a mist stealin' down, and you'd better have a pilot on as far as Amaden; I'll see about it if you want it."

"Maybe I shall—but whose turn is it?"

"Ben's, I doubt," was the reply.

"Oh, hang *him*, he'll never do for me; he'll smother me in coal-dust, and is as likely as not to give out; I'd rather be without him—or anyone if I could. But I'm afraid you're right, there's fifty waggons—a tidy lot for *Polyphemus*."

"Needs must, when somebody drives," muttered the turner, "not meanin' any offence, Bob, to you. But we'll see; keep a good fire, and nothin' won't hurt you up the bank—not even Ben!"

Eldred shook his head, and after screwing down his brake, and putting the lever in mid-gear, he went underneath the engine. A very fortunate thing it was for him that he was so careful. He was oiling the "motion" of his engine, when Ben Carless came to hook on as "pilot." He didn't whistle, but came backing down on *Polyphemus*, little thinking that the driver was underneath that engine.

The buffers met with a bang—not a very hard knock, but quite sufficient to have moved *Polyphemus* a foot or so, and to have slackened the attachment to the trucks behind. As it was the big engine quivered a little, but hardly moved an inch; had the collision had the ordinary effect, which it certainly would have had if the driver had not taken such precautions, Eldred would have lost his arm even if he had not been killed outright.

Backing out from beneath the engine he let fly a volley at Ben for his carelessness.

Ben was deeply grieved, and attempted an apology, which Eldred accepted very grimly.

"I believe thou'lt be my death," he replied. "Thou'rt Carless by name and careless by nature. I've a mind to report ye, and I would too, if it warn't for thy Lucy—d'ye hear?"

"Ay, I hear ye; but what d'ye want under the ingin without your mate up; he don't know where you are."

"Give me any cheek, and I'll knock thy head off," growled Eldred. "Thou'rt not fit to drive a hearse, let alone an ingin!"

"I'm fit enough for such as you," muttered the crestfallen Benjamin. "Take care I don't leave you in the lurch, my lad!"

Eldred did not hear this soliloquy. He finished his oiling in the regulation manner, going from right, his own side, round the fine machine which towered above him—the immense boiler, high over head, the great wheels coupled with massive rods, the cylinders within the framing in front, the eccentrics and piston-rods, bright and smooth, the red glow from the fire-box, and over all a terrible sense of power indicated by the rigid firmness and uprightness of the structure with its defiant chimney standing up so independently! Only an engine! On the line close by, a train dashes along full of life and energy, but smoothly; swaying at times, lifting a little as the engine bounds triumphantly on, pulling without apparent effort a heavy load of passengers. Another will follow with "express goods," and travel as fast as the *Dutchman* or the *Zulu*. Only engines!

Polyphemus began to think that it was time to be off. The steam was simmering out of the valve, lifting it occasionally, and threatening to rush out with a sudden roar, but he quelled his impatience a little longer. Evening was closing in. The great lamps were

lighted, and the shunting was going on, without any pause, as regularly as before. The signal was given at last, and the long train of waggons and trucks bumped out of the siding to the main line.

Ben, as pilot, had to look out. Though he was a less experienced hand the responsibility devolved upon him, and he had to assist *Polyphemus* up the banks, keeping a bright look-out.

But Eldred and his mate also had to look out, for this is one of the principal parts of engine-driving.

And yet that very looking out was nearly fatal. It seems ironical to record that the performance of that all-important duty nearly led to Eldred's destruction! On a locomotive one's eyes and ears must be always on the alert to catch any unusual sight or sound. . . . The train was proceeding at a fair speed; *Polyphemus* was puffing soberly, and much more quietly than the "goods" engine under Ben's pilotage.

Suddenly a knocking sound reached the ear of Eldred. Was anything the matter with *Polyphemus*? did "she" not steam properly? or was the sound only carried back from the goods engine? To ascertain the fact, driver Eldred leaned out over the side of his engine in the dark, and listened. All seemed right, and he was again raising his head, on which a "billy-cock" hat rested, when his head gear received a sharp blow on the hard brim—it was turned round violently, not knocked off—and he fell back, almost into the arms of the fireman.

An exclamation of horror from the latter was almost drowned by the noise of a passing goods train.

Eldred pulled himself together, and felt his head. He seemed dazed, surprised, unable to grasp the situation.

"I thought you were killed!" whispered the

fireman. "Heavens above! How did you escape? Was it timber struck you?"

"Something sticking out from one of those trucks hit my hat! 'Twas a mercy I wasn't bending lower. My head would have been cracked like a nut. I wonder what it was!"

He pinched his felt hat into shape again. The rim was damaged, and the upper part of the crown scored and indented. Something had struck the hat, and not being absolutely rigid had "run up" the crown, bending it with the concussion. What the "something" was Eldred never ascertained, but he remembered his escape for many a day, and considered it little short of miraculous.*

The night was fine, clear, and cool; yet the silence, save for the rattling and bumping of the train, would have impressed our friends. Overhead the stars twinkled, and a youthful moon was slowly sinking in a dim crescent into its rest in the west.

There was a kind of haze hanging about in the sky, and the stars, when clear of the smoke and steam of the engines, twinkled fitfully in the firmament. Some white and green lights ahead indicated that the line was clear. *Polyphemus*, reined in to suit the less rapid progress of his "pilot," was running very quietly. No lurid gleam of red warned of death and danger. The furnace door made the steam ruddy for a space, as it drifted over the foot-plate. A glow rested on two brave faces, on two hardy men, and flashed upon the hedges and on the bricks of bridges by and under which the engine passed.

Ames wore a somewhat anxious look, and the driver noticed it.

* This incident is true, and occurred to the writer himself on a locomotive.

"Bain't thee all right, mate?" he inquired, as he gazed with some interest upon his young companion—a new hand who had only made a few trips, but who being intelligent and willing had already been given a good berth.

"Ay! I'm right enough, Bob; but I can't help thinking of mother!"

"Thinkin' o' thy mother, lad! Well, that ain't any harm, and needn't make thee melancholy neither."

"No, only she's dead, mate, that's all!"

"Ay, but thou'rt alive, and so don't matter."

"Daresay she's happier than us," continued the driver after a pause; "but anyway we can't help it whether or not! Touch that feed, mate."

Ames turned on the feed a bit, and the men resumed their stations in silence: both were attentive; yet, to be candid, I must say that both were uneasy—the driver, because he was superstitious, and half feared a repetition of the apparition which had already twice warned him; and the fireman, because he had a presentiment that something strange was about to happen.

Yet what *could* possibly happen? The line was clear, the night was fine, the *Polyphemus* in splendid fettle, ready to stop in a few moments; only the automatic brake was not on the goods waggons, and that, of course, made a difference.

But the driver, as an old hand, knew quite well that skill, fine weather, and signals all set "off," did not always obviate danger. The mistake would not lie at his door if there were any mistake, but this he did not anticipate. He knew that signalmen and shunters and lads had a (sometimes fatal) habit of thinking, without reasoning out chances. He knew

that a man had once sent a "special" to destruction, because he did not change his tail-lights on the siding as he should have done, but on the main line; and that the signalman, seeing white lights, *inferred* that the goods was safe inside the points, and permitted the "special" to run through the station, at the farther side of which it struck the shunting "goods," and played havoc with both trains and engines. Eldred knew that many such incidents do occur, and that the newspapers call them "accidents," and pity the poor people concerned. But the goods brakesman knew how "the special" was wrecked, and if he had been asked about the lamps at the inquest, he must have either condemned himself, or have committed perjury. He was not questioned on this point, and the signalman was the sufferer.

So it is quite possible for a man to be killed or wounded, and his train wrecked, while everything is in his favour. Skill, signals, and steadiness will not avail if there is a weak hand outside the engine.

Not long ago, on the Great Northern, an experienced driver was killed by a shunting train as he was oiling his engine at King's Cross Station. The space he or his mate had allowed between the converging rails when they pulled up was not sufficient to allow him to stand between the lines. He was leaning over to oil the "motion," the passing train caught his legs, and killed him on the spot. . . .

On *Polyphemus*, as I have said, both men were anxious, but neither guessed that there was any real cause for alarm. At the top of the incline the pilot slackened speed, and then stopped at the station. There was some shunting to be performed, and as the *Polyphemus* was buckled to the waggons, it

was, of course, included in the business. A stop was necessary, for the mail was due ; so when the train was put back, and white tail-lights shown, the points were opened for the mail. It came, and passed, and then the ordinary shunting and "picking up" began.

The up and down signals being put "on," the line was blocked for through traffic. A ground light suddenly shifted from red to white. Then the driver whistled, and began to move as soon as the goods guard signalled, which he did by moving his lamp from side to side *white*, which meant "come back to main line." The *Polyphemus* and the pilot quickly ran the train out, and when it was all again on the main line, a *green* light waved *sideways* sent it backwards into the points opposite, where three waggons were left, and then some empties picked up. So quite ten minutes were consumed there.

The signal to be off was soon given, and with a tug the pilot started. There is a steep hill on the eastern side of the station, a long hill, and a considerable pull is necessary. With such a heavy train the engines were well in steam, and Eldred then was pleased to think that Ben was his pilot, for he knew he could not have kept time up the bank with such a load, and his fire was not very good. It was rather too heavy, there was too much coal, and the steam did not generate rapidly.

"Thou'st about choked it, Dick. Thou shouldn't think so much of the mother! Suppose we'd been without a pilot, we'd 'a stuck for steam on this bank : danged if we wouldn't!"

After a few stronger observations the angry driver looked to the fire himself. It had not been improved by the shunting apparently : it wanted more air, but just then it was best let alone.

Ames took his scolding gently. He knew that he had blundered; but he could hardly remedy the error then. The engine was dragging a little; but the summit of the bank was nearly reached, and on the down grade the fire might recover. But, horror of horrors! as Eldred and his mate were looking ahead, wishing for the top of the incline, they were panic-stricken to perceive the pilot break loose, and dart off at increased speed over the top of the bank!

Polyphemus uttered a wild shriek of recall, but it was of no use. The pilot sped away down the hill at an uncontrollable pace, and Eldred and his mate looked at each other in dismay. They were on a steep incline with a partly disabled engine and a heavy load of trucks!

Besides this danger, the South Express was due behind them in ten minutes, when they ought to be safe at the next station but one! What was to be done?

CHAPTER IV.

A TERRIBLE INCIDENT—BOB ELDRED'S COURTSHIP
—AMOS KILLBY'S REVENGE AND ELDRED'S
DETERMINATION.

"We shall never do it, by gum!" cried Eldred. "Dick, lad, thou may'st give up thy mother now. We can't top this bank, and we can't separate the waggons."

"Shove on the steam, can't you?" said the young fireman. "It's blowing off, right enough."

"No use," muttered Eldred; "we're going back

a'ready. The trucks is pulling us down again. Sound the brake whistle, thou booby ; and catch her up with the sand and the brakes hard."

Dick, thoroughly alarmed, did as he was bidden : the guards put on their brakes too, but the momentum was slowly—surely—increasing. In vain *Polyphemus* slipped and puffed ; in vain the sand poured out in a white shower on the greasy rails ; the engine had lost its hold—the steam was not sufficient to pull the load !

"Whistle again, mate ; consume thee !"

Eldred was very angry : he had no time to be nervous. He must act, not think. He hoped that the guards would get out, and apply the brakes to the waggons and trucks, but they did not dare to stir. The train had by this time acquired some speed.

"Thou canst run?" exclaimed Eldred to his miserable fireman. "Get thee down, and let go the brakes of all the waggons thou canst reach ; thou'rt no good here. Run on to the points."

Dick Ames at once leaped from the step, and running rapidly along the train, had actually succeeded in letting go three of the truck brakes—no mean task—when a flashing light ahead attracted Eldred's attention, and he muttered—

"The fast goods down, I s'pose : he may help us, and warn the express behind us."

Then he whistled sharply, to call the attention of the driver of the approaching engine. To his surprise, it proved to be a "light" engine, and Eldred at once recognised it as his quondam "pilot."

"Warn the express, and open the siding !" roared Eldred. "I can't check the load !"

A whistle was the only reply, and the pilot disappeared in the darkness. Eldred hoped that Dick might perhaps reach the points before the lumbering

train, which he and the alarmed guards were doing all they could to hold in check meantime. If Ames could only reach that upper siding's points in time, and throw them open, all would be well. They were not moved from the box there, but worked by a switch handle. The light engine could warn the signalman, whose box was beyond the station, some distance off on the opposite incline.

Ames had run like a deer to the points when he found that he could not let go any more of the brakes *Polyphemus* continued to drop down, pulled to destruction by the trucks and waggons, in the darkness. Eldred did all he could, but the weight and the grade together were too much for our *Polyphemus*, who thus early in his life had a terrible struggle for existence. He strained every nerve to resist the threatened danger, but in vain!

Down—down went the train, pulling *Polyphemus* relentlessly to his death! It was lamentable to see that splendid giant dragged, panting, backwards; struggling to overcome the aggregated puny efforts of the common vehicles he had led! It was as if a wearied Samson were being played with by a posse of Philistine children, who were taking advantage of his weakness.

Driver Eldred gave up the battle; personally he could do no more. His brakes were on, and the steam was also on, but not yielding sufficient power. One of the guards had already leaped down—the front man still clung to his brake; but the collision with the express, or with the blocking buffers in the siding, was a prospect too grim for the rear guard, who leaped out.

The head light of the express was now visible behind the trucks, and unless Ben could manage to warn the train, it must dash into the goods

somewhere. All this takes much longer to describe than it took in reality. In fact, many things happen simultaneously: on paper they must be described consecutively. But just as Eldred had made up his mind to jump, there came a crashing sound through the darkness: the light engine had passed on, but the trucks were off the line, and Eldred was thrown from his engine by the shock of the colliding waggons.

Just below the points is a bridge over a highway, and near where the trucks derailed is an archway over a field—a right of way which was quickly closed by falling trucks and their contents. The engine remained on the rails. *Polyphemus* was steady, but Eldred was bruised by his sudden fall on the line.

Nevertheless, he scrambled up, and managed to “take stock” of the affair, as he subsequently said. His own words will give the best idea of the calamity which negligence had brought about. This is the substance of his description:—

“In all your days you never saw such a smash! Half of the trucks were in the field, and of the rest, some was off the metals, some on, and some half on. Barrels had burst and sent a shower of flour over some trucks, and it was a mercy as the oil in the cans near them didn’t explode. There was every chance of a blow-up then, for there was a powder waggon near, and it might have burst. Some waggons were not damaged at all, whole trucks were piled up on each other, and all kinds of merchandise scattered on the line, the siding, and in the field below. My ingen was all right; but when I came to find the cause of the smash, I found young Dick lying mangled on the ballast! Then I came to understand, without any tellin’, that he’d been overtaken and knocked over by the ‘light’ ingen goin’ to stop the express: he must

ha' been runnin' on the down line, and knocked clear off the road between the trucks, and his dead body caused the accident! Poor young Dick! no wonder he had that queer feeling. He was 'fey,' sir; doomed; and he knew it! The express? Oh, she was detained, and the traffic run on the down road."

The reasons for the accident were perfectly clear: a failing coupling; a choked fire, and consequent want of steam; and the hasty but well-meant effort of Ben Carless, who, having got across the points on top of the bank, near the quarry sidings, had run back to warn the express. Ben in consequence was not reprimanded severely, but Eldred was heavily fined, though not degraded. The express worked up on the down line after a long delay.

The line was speedily cleared, as most of the wreck lay on the off side; *Polyphemus* was again set going, and the crushed body of the youthful fireman was picked up to await the inquest, at which a verdict of "accidental death" was returned. Poor lad! He died on duty through the lack of knowledge of firing an engine properly. Eldred was responsible too, and for many a day the "accident" weighed heavily upon him. Ben was equally culpable in his way for not seeing to his couplings.

But enough has been said to indicate the hidden dangers from which engine-men may suffer. Let us resume our narrative.

Eldred and a relief man brought home *Polyphemus* next day, and the former, when restored to duty, found himself again in charge of his own engine, greatly to his delight, for he had not been long married, and suspension was galling to him. This was his first serious failure, and he attributed it to the

"red hand." But this terrible apparition may be very easily explained. The circumstances, however, are somewhat romantic.

To do this, we must also explain a few incidents connected with Eldred's career before *Polyphemus* came into existence, and then come "down to date" again.

Bob was a good-looking, independent "chap," as his mates allowed, and a favourite generally. He had a pleasant face, bright eyes, and a frank look which won him friends almost at first sight. When he was driving the day-goods he had often caught sight of a very pretty girl in a garden belonging to a farm-house by the railway, near Wellhamthorpe.

With this charming damsel did Eldred exchange "signals." She thought no harm in nodding and smiling at the handsome engine-driver, who would touch his whistle as he was approaching the garden, and bring out pretty Mary Evans to the hedge to wave her hand, and nod and smile as the train lumbered by. Sometimes Eldred, when returning, caught sight of a railway man in the garden—a brakesman—and perceived with some jealous feelings that the girl was chatting merrily with this fellow, whose name was Amos Killby—a not very estimable person, whose antecedents were not of the most refined or respectable character: a mean man, and low-minded.

"Sorry for her if she takes up with him!" remarked Eldred to his mate. "I wouldn't touch him with a 'pricker.*' She's a deal too trim to couple up with such as him!"

"Then why don't ye hook on to her yerself?" asked his mate promptly. "Run Amos off the road," he added.

* A furnace-poker: a long rod used on the foot-plate.

Eldred was silent. He pondered his mate's words, and came to the conclusion that it was his duty to "cut out" Mr. Amos Killby.

But to do this he must become acquainted with the family at the farm, and how to compass this he could hardly tell. He was rather retiring, and disliked intruding or being intruded on; besides, his time was so occupied. But one Sunday, when he was off duty, he made up his mind to go to Wexthorpe, and walk through Wellhamthorpe to the farm-house where dwelt the pretty damsel.

No one could have been more astonished than pretty Molly when Bob Eldred came up to the farm-house. At first she had not the slightest idea who he was; for it must be remembered that an engine-man in his "best" on a Sunday or "off"-day is a very different person outwardly from the man whom one sees and converses with on the foot-plate of an engine, or on the platform of a railway-station. If dress at any time makes the man it makes the engine-man, off duty. The writer has frequently been surprised by a touch of a hat or cap accorded by a good-looking young fellow, whose bright eyes and gleaming teeth seemed not unfamiliar, but whose appearance generally was strange, until a modest reference to some "Bill" or "Jack" on a certain engine has brought home the conviction to the mind that here is "Ned," the fireman, holiday-making with his "young woman!"

So we need not be much surprised if Miss Mary Evans did not immediately recognise Mr. Eldred, who introduced himself as a wayfarer requiring a glass of water or a drop of milk.

"It ain't much water or milk thou drink'st," laughed a spruce young man, who seemed very

anxious to get into Molly's pocket, so close was he sitting to her. This person was Mr. Amos Killby, the young brakesman already referred to.

"That's the last thee's told," was Eldred's reply. "I never drinks aught intoxicatin'. Besides, I wasn't speakin' to thee any way, lad: so keep thy conversation till it's axed for another time. Can you oblige me, miss?"

"Certainly," replied Molly, rising. "Have you come far?" she asked, pausing at the door to have another look at this man who puzzled her by his manner. She seemed to know him, too!

"On'y from Wellhamthorpe—I'm not on the engine, ye see, to-day."

Mary Evans blushed a deep red. Then this *was* the man to whom she had signalled so often, and who had so many times kissed to her his work-stained hands, black and brawny! Was it possible that this good-looking, bearded young man, so neat and tidy, not the least awkward either, was an engine-driver?

"Didn't thee know me, lass?" he asked in a whisper through the half-opened door to her outside.

"Why, of course, man!" was Molly's reply. "D'ye think I'm blind? I was only wonderin' what-ever brought ye here!"

Bob Eldred brightened up again. Molly had seen the disappointed and mortified look in his face which her astonishment and confusion had brought there, and she fibbed to save her new lover from embarrassment and pain. Some girls would have teased him and driven him away, but she perceived that Eldred was modest, so she humoured him.

Thus the desired intimacy commenced; and,

notwithstanding the obvious jealousy and hostility of Amos, Molly Evans continued to encourage his rival. Moreover, her parents did not entirely approve of Mr. Killby, whose acquaintances were regarded as hardly the "right sort." He had been frequently seen in private and earnest consultation with a suspicious-looking but well-dressed man. This person had travelled in his van, and sometimes valuable consignments had disappeared !

But Amos had always plausible explanations to offer, and no proof of his complicity ever arose. The stranger seemed innocent, and was known as a racing stock-broker, Ricketts by name, who had many friends on the line. These circumstances, however, militated against Killby's suit ; he did not obtain any advancement, while Eldred went up the list and prospered.

The engine-driver and the brakesman frequently encountered each other, but Eldred ignored his rival, while Miss Mary Evans snubbed him. On more than one occasion, when Killby was particularly savage, he had challenged Eldred to combat, but the latter invariably treated the challenge with careless contempt, until one day, in the shed, a rude and utterly unjustifiable remark upon Miss Mary drew down Eldred's wrath.

A fierce tussle ensued. Amos fought well, and, excited by his jealousy, gave Eldred enough to keep him away. But the north-countryman was not long in finding his way to Master Killby's ugly features. A few "straight" ones made the brakesman wince, and when, after a "close," he came down over Eldred's shoulder with a horrible thud on a cinder-heap, he forgot to get up again, and the engine-driver was proclaimed the victor.

This encounter decided the matter. Mr. Amos went no more to the farm. He brooded in silence on his revenge, and when he was supposed to be on sick-leave he, on two occasions, endeavoured to upset Eldred's train! Each time the engine-driver had seen him in the light of the "up" danger signal, which gave him a ruddy hue, and each time Amos had plunged into the brushwood, his task only just begun, near the lattice-bridge, unrecognised.

On the first occasion he would have in all probability succeeded, had not some platelayers disturbed him, and "hung about" so long that night that he had no opportunity to carry out his dastardly crime. On the other occasion he tripped and fell heavily, and narrowly escaped being run over by the very train he had intended to wreck. As it was he dislocated his ankle, and had to crawl home in agony, where he remained for five weeks, unable to work, unpitied, but unappeased.

Meanwhile Eldred was married, and took his pretty wife to a pleasant cottage with a garden, which Farmer Evans stocked, on the outskirts of Wellhamthorpe.

This is, briefly, the history of the engine-driver's courtship—a romance amid the hard realities of daily life—an oasis of love and sentiment in the desert of duty and hard facts, of danger, even on the borders of death. But no accident had ever happened to Eldred until the night on which he much against his will took on Ben Carless as pilot to his last trip with a "goods" train.

"Bob, there's somethin' the matter wi' ye," exclaimed his wife when he at length appeared. It was not usual for the driver to come in at that hour, and Mrs. Eldred needed no very special intelligence to convince her that something had gone wrong.

"It isn't the ingin, is it? You ain't hurted, Bob?"

"No, my lass," replied Bob, as he entered wearily and seated himself heavily in a Windsor chair "I'm all right, and the ingin! Poor Dick's gone!"

"Dick Ames! Oh, tell me! There was a pitch in? Oh, Bob dear, are you *sure* you're not hurted? Tell me the truth!"

"Did I ever lie to thee, my girl?" he replied, as he pulled her face close to his own. "I'm all right, but I'd Ben Carless pilot, and the couplin's broke on the bank." . . .

"The couplin's! Well, hadn't you your ingin in steam?" she interrupted.

"Ay, but Dick he choked the fire, and we got short, so we dropped back, and ran down after the 'goods' ingin broke away. Poor Dick was run over."

Then he related the circumstances in detail, and Mary followed the narrative with fixed attention.

"Bob," she said solemnly, "do you think the couplin's broke natural, or o' purpose?"

"What are you drivin' at, Molly?" asked the driver with a surprised look, and a flash in his eye which meant danger to somebody. "Speak up! If the' knows aught, out with it! If the' knows nowt, drop it! So, my lass, clear the road one way or t'other."

"Oh, Bob, don't ye be angry! I only asked a question, not meanin' any harm; but——"

"But it's you women axin' questions as makes mischief," replied Eldred irritably. "If the' knows any cause or 'pediment out with it, or shut it up. There's Prayer Book for ye!"

"Well, dear, you know——"

"I *don't*!" shouted her husband. "I want to know. What is it all about? I'm bothered and

bamfoozled enough. Tell me now, Molly, and be quick!"

"It's about Amos Killby then, Bob. Mr. Bowler said he'd been goin' on about you—that is, Killby had. But Amos himself came up here, not in first-rate fettle, and began about his illness and his injury. I questioned him about it, and I could see that he wasn't himself. But he boasted a lot about what he intended to do to someone who had injured him; and Bob, I began to be afeard about you—I fancied from what he let out that perhaps he had tried to frighten you, and when you came in to-night I began to fancy that it was him who had a finger in it now. Oh, Bob! my dear, suppose he had injured or killed you!"

Mrs. Eldred threw herself upon her husband's neck, and while embracing him, wept. All her pent-up anxiety found vent in tears, and she sobbed on her husband's shoulder.

"Come, come, lass! Don't take it so," said Eldred in soothing accents. "I'm main sorry I upset thee, Molly. Just unhook thyself a minute and settle down. Now, what's all this business, anyway?"

Molly dutifully obeyed. She unclasped her arms and looked steadily at her husband. She perceived that he was pale, and wore a very determined look. Whom or what did he suspect?

He was thinking of the mysterious appearance of the man with the red hand, and was already of opinion that there was nothing of a ghostly nature about him. He also reflected on his narrow escape, and was wondering whether his wife's suspicions regarding Amos were well founded, or merely prejudice.

"I'll just ha' this out with Master Amos," said

Eldred after a while. "There's to be no manner of interferin' atween me and you or *Polyphemus*. That's just settled. Now, Molly, any more?"

"Well, Killby was just rude, and looked very threatening. He said some things I didn't like. But," she concluded, "I'm sure he wasn't quite himself, else he wouldn't 'a said what he did, and come within reach o' my ten fingers! I made his ears tingle, anyway."

"So ye banged him, did ye? Well, then, don't do it agen, my lass. Leave him to me; but if the' wants to make him a present, best buy him a pair o' crutches for keepsake."

"You won't injure him, Bob? Let him alone—he isn't worth thinking about."

"Ain't he! I think different. These vermin want killin', or they will do some injury. I'll look after him pretty tidy, you'll see. He ain't far off, and I can take his measure for his crutches!"

With these ominous words Robert Eldred quitted his cottage, hungry and weary as he was. Putting aside all his wife's entreaties to "bide a while" he left her abruptly, and took his way along the railway line, in the direction of the "works."

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT ENGINE WORKS—AN ENCOUNTER—THE HATCHING OF MR. RICKETTS' LITTLE PLOT.

To the "genteel" public of Wellhamthorpe the locomotive works and shops, the carriage and waggon works, repairing sheds, and forges; the drawing-office

and superintendent's rooms; the "stables" of the engines; the turning shops; the boring shops; the springs manufactory; the boiler and pattern houses; and the immense area of vehicles, machines, wheels, etc., movable and at rest—are as unknown as Central Africa. The "genteel" people live on the slope of the hill, and do not mix with the real population which surrounds the large walled-in area, from which at times tall chimneys fling masses of smoke; and whence arises an everlasting noise of hammers, whistles, whirring lathes, hissing steam, rushing, clattering bands, and puffing locomotives; rapid trains, which course swiftly behind the wall, by lines of invalided engines and tenders, which are awaiting the final judgment—the consignment to "scrap" and the "everlasting fire" of the forge. These are things strange to the "genteel."

To Bob Eldred, of course, all these sights and sounds were familiar. But at that time the works were almost silent—that is, silent for them. The main body of the great army of mechanics had vanished; the great gates were securely closed; the active watchmen on the alert were ready to give the alarm or call to the engine-driver and his mate. There is no rest for the sheds; the cleaners are busy as bees, using oil and "elbow-grease" in almost equal proportions.

"I'll have it out with him," muttered the driver. "I'll find his place, and dang me if I don't leather him!"

He proceeded down the line in the direction of the shops, and many traits of railway life, well known to him, but almost strange to the public, met his eyes, and again impressed themselves in his brain. He saw the reason for the raising of the outer rail of the curve to counteract the tendency of the train to fly off at

a tangent; he remarked how smoothly the passing train ran after the rain, which swelled the wooden pegs that kept the rails tight in their chairs, and stopped the jarring, almost inseparable from travelling. He perceived what many disbelieved, and more ignored—viz., the wearing away of the western rail so much faster than the eastern because of the earth's rotation! He could give a shrewd guess at the number of miles the line is longer on a hot summer's day, by reason of the expansion; and knew that the reason why the rails are never *quite close* together is to admit of such expansion. Eldred had not gone about with his eyes shut, or he would not have been driving fast passenger trains at nine-and-twenty or thirty years of age, nor would *Polyphemus* have been entrusted to his charge.

Perhaps fortunately both for Eldred and his enemy, the latter could not be found; nor did any of his mates who happened to be about volunteer any information concerning Amos. So the angry driver returned home again, and ate his supper gloomily. He was irritable and annoyed at being suspended, anxious for his future; angry with his late rival and with himself. Worse than all, he had no one on whom to pour out the vials of his wrath. But an interruption was in store for him which induced a better frame of mind.

A knock at the door aroused him. He rose lazily and carelessly; but his faithful wife, not many weeks a bride, prevented him, and he, man-like, let her go.

"It's a note, Bob," she said, as she reappeared.

"Who is it from, then?" he asked.

"I can't tell till it's open, man. Open it and see."

His wife's firm reply brought the driver up short. He took the letter and glanced at it.

"From Mr. Cannon," he said. "He wants me to-morrow. I suppose I'm in for a talkin' to, at least. Well, I'll be there; nine o'clock, mind."

Mr. Cannon was the district locomotive superintendent, and no doubt Eldred was right. He would have a "talking to!"

"It will be all right to-morrow, Bob dear. Mr. Cannon will replace you, and, after all, it's only three days off, maybe."

"Three days means twenty-two shillings," muttered the driver of *Polyphemus*, "and you'll say the same when the kids comes!"

To this suggestion Mrs. Eldred made no reply in words. She merely smiled, and kissed her husband into good temper.

"Never mind Amos," she said, after a pause. "He won't hurt you. But all the same, I'd have my eyes round if I was you."

"They can't be no rounder than they are by natur'," replied the mollified driver. So by degrees his clever young wife pacified him; and by the time he had had his second pipe and some cider he felt a man again.

"But don't let me catch Amos hanging round here," was his closing defiance. "If I does, look out."

Next morning driver Eldred waited upon his commander-in-chief, who, after investigation, made up his mind on the question. He had instituted personal inquiries, and was satisfied that the driver, though responsible, was innocent. He had been fined by suspension, and he was allowed to go to duty after three days' idleness.

"Don't let me have any more complaints or accidents, Eldred," was the closing speech. "If you can't

manage the passenger traffic now, you must go back to the goods again."

"Never, sir. If I'm put back I'll give up the job. I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Cannon ; and you won't be disappointed, I think. But a man can't drive agin nature and meanness."

As the superintendent paid no attention to this last sentence, the interview ended.

Eldred quitted the room, and strolled into the sheds, confident of his employment shortly. The foreman had had instructions. Bob would find himself in the list in due course, and *Polyphemus* in his charge again.

All engine-drivers are employed in lists, on " rosters " called " links," in which their turns are taken ; and when they come on duty with ticket they can find their engine in the shed, as already explained, by a perusal of the list, which tells them the *locale* of their steed.

After seeing the foreman, Eldred was passing along the line to his home when he caught sight of a figure he knew. A light sprang into his eyes. He braced himself up, and walked more rapidly.

The man whom he intended to overtake was Amos Killby. Hewas convalescentand sober now. But he was an energetic young fellow. He had begged to be reinstated ; was rather ashamed of his conduct, and probably, if he had not encountered the irritable Eldred, he would have returned to work next day, and would possibly have reformed. The action lay in his own hands, but some of us are apt to expect Providence to interfere with our wills, and actually, by some miraculous occurrence, to put us out of temptation ! What is our will worth if it does not help us at a pinch ? Let us trust to Providence, by all means ; but emulate

the brave and good captain—"Keep our powder dry," also!

As it happened, these two antagonists were both inclined for a dispute. Eldred was naturally indignant, because Amos had been insolent to Mrs. Eldred. Though she had personally chastised Amos, Bob was in no degree pacified; in fact, he rather was ashamed that Molly had struck the interloper, who he knew had plenty of pluck, and certainly would not retaliate on a woman.

Curiously enough, although Amos had no idea that Bob was behind him, his pace sensibly slackened. Eldred quickened his steps, and so, like a couple of thunder-clouds, the adversaries approached each other, although one was absolutely unaware of the proximity of the other.

"Hollo, cur!" cried Eldred. "Turn thy puppy face this way, else thou'rt shamed to show the marks of woman's fingers!"

Amos Killby turned suddenly at this address, which first flushed, and then paled his face. He stared stolidly at the engine-driver.

"Ah, 'tis you, is it! So you've turned up again. Had *your* ears boxed by a young vixen too, maybe; ye look hang-dog enough for a thief, man."

"Leave my looks alone, and mind thy own ugly face; I've half mind to throttle thee, monkey-face!"

"So they said ye wrecked your train—a driver as couldn't fire his engine, but can kill his mate! 'Monkey-face'*: that's your 'goods' education, I s'pose! Got the sack, I hear."

"Look here, Amos, what business had the' in my house t'other day, and frightenin' my wife, eh?"

* "Monkey-face" is the term applied to the three red lamps in the form of a triangle, in rear of a goods train.

"Ax about! I can go and see a girl when a' wants to, I s'pose; an old friend she is, afore she took up with a goods smasher."

"There thee s'poses wrong; just lie down, or I'll make thee—ah! would ye, cur?"

Amos had stooped, as if to tie his boot; but he seized a large stone instead, and defied his adversary.

"Come, drop that, and fight it out like a man, if the' wants to fight," cried Eldred.

"I'll cut yer eye out if ye touch me," replied the brakesman; "you're a bully, and will get a hidin' some o' these days, when ye've learnt to drive a ingin."

This taunt roused Eldred's ire to a dangerous pitch, but he replied craftily—

"Ah! there's them behind the' that'll make the' run in two minutes, lad; and then talk o' bullyin'! Thou'rt a poor thing, too."

This artful speech had the desired effect. Killby turned quickly, and in another second was seized in the driver's powerful grip, and his arm pinioned.

"Now drop the stone, lad, or I'll break thy head wi' it!"

The fellow struggled in vain, and tried to throw Eldred; but the sturdy engine-man resisted him, and in the struggle Killby loosed the stone, and hit the driver with his clenched fist. A fierce struggle ensued, and the men wrestled desperately; but in a few moments Eldred threw his opponent, and both rolled down the embankment, and into a deep puddle of water which lay beneath it.

The sudden plunge cooled their ardour, and they mutually unclasped their grip. The quondam brakesman managed to escape first, and was quickly



mother with your chatter—I'll take you a pint into the parlour."

"Bring it here first, please; and just touch it yourself to give it a relish—it wants it," he muttered, as the girl disappeared. "Why did them chaps choose the 'Moon' of all places, unless they're lunatics?"

This phase of the question seemed to please him, for he smiled, and the old woman, who was apparently stone deaf, inquired what amused him.

"Nothin' you said, you old chump," was the polite reply, to which the woman smiled assent and asked to hear it again. "Only a thought of lunatics in this Moon," shouted Amos.

The old lady nodded. "There's friends o' yours in the parlour, isn't there? They've been inquirin' for ye, Martha says."

Amos nodded; and just then Martha entered with the beer, which, when she had tasted in compliance with his wishes, the man quickly disposed of. Then, finding himself more presentable after some ministrations of the kind-hearted Martha, who seemed to have some little weakness concerning him, Killby rejoined his friends. There were no strangers present then, and one of the men said—

"Come along, mate. What cheer?"

"Nothin';" growled Amos. "Still off. There's some chance, I'm told. But I must do somethin', I can't starve while I'm gettin' well."

"Why not?" said the third man cynically. "Better men have."

"And worse has lived at other men's expenses—you should know that much," replied Amos. "Now, gents, what d'ye want with me?"

"We heard you were out o' luck, and being a bit friendly we didn't like to see you put upon," said

the first speaker, whom Amos put down in his mind as Number One. "Did we, Jack?"

"No," replied the cynical gentleman. "Certainly not; particularly when we saw a chance of a deal to ourselves."

"Well, what's it all about? It's gettin' late. Is there any business in it?"

"Business!" replied the cynical one, who seemed somewhat superior to his associate, not only in appearance, but in manner and education. "Of course there is business! You've helped us a bit before—a trifle of robbery doesn't come amiss to *you*!"

"Why, you're never goin' to split!" exclaimed Amos in terror. "You benefited by it—it was you who——"

"Certainly," replied Jack. "We only remind you of these little adventures because we want you to understand *how* you stand. It's a long time ago, you say? Well, never mind that. Now, this time we have a plant on—a 'dead' plant."

"Dead plants isn't much good usually," said Amos, with a mild attempt at pleasantry. "They're apt to turn out unpleasant."

"Oh, if you're going to be funny we'll put you out of this; and *that* will have unpleasant consequences for *you*! Keep your wit for the old woman in the kitchen. You can help us, and you must. You won't be suspected. D'ye hear?"

"Ay, I hear. What is the game? I suppose it's no use my fightin' agen you, Mr. Ricketts!"

"Not a bit. The business is easy enough. Do you ever run on the mail train?"

"Never," replied Amos. "Want promotion first."

"You understand the manner in which the bags are unhooked and dropped?"

"Ay, I've seen it done. What then?"

"Well, I have information that on a certain night the mail bags at Wrockham will contain very valuable consignments. How do I know? Never mind; I *do* know! Do you know Wrockham and Fellham?"

"Yes, pretty well," replied Amos.

"Then you know the big company there. It does a fine business, and in October, I am informed, its correspondence is worth money in post-office orders and bank notes, bills, and cheques. They are an old-fashioned set, and trust human nature. This is an error. Human nature has betrayed them. On a certain evening the bags will contain large sums for places abroad, and will go by the steamer the next morning. We must have those bags, mate; you must unhook them before the net catches them, and you will hand them to some of us who will be there."

Amos was silent. How was he to purloin the bags? He must overcome the official at the station, and run the risk of penal servitude if captured or suspected! Then the signal-box was close at hand, and, as the signalman knew him, the difficulty would be increased. He did not like the business at all, and he said so; he "couldn't do it."

"I tell you you *must* and *shall*," replied the cynical man. "You can get nearer than we can. No one will suspect you, and if there is specie in the train we may manage a haul on that too. It's a splendid trap. A few sleepers on the metals, a jerk, a fine confusion; you make off with the bags, we find what we can on the train. By the time the passengers and post-office men have recovered their senses we shall have the registered letters in hand, and you'll be away. Don't be afraid."

Amos did not at all like the idea of this. He had

performed several little services for these men, but he had never been so deeply implicated in their transactions as this. To wreck a train was one thing: to pilfer a goods waggon was another. He knew that coals, and sometimes a few pints of milk, were abstracted on the journey and consumed on the engine, or in the vans, *en route*, but the upsetting of a train! The injury done to passengers and officials would in this instance be too great a risk.

"I don't like it," he replied. "Can't you do without me in it? If anyone is killed——"

"Who will be killed? The driver is on our side. He won't kill himself, you bet."

"Who is the driver you expect on? Not Bob Eldred!" cried Amos eagerly. "If it was *him*——!"

"Ah! you'd work then, wouldn't ye?" sneered Number One. "But it isn't *him*; it's Manvers. He will be on the turn, and when our two signals explode he will pull up, run on gently, and you can nip up the bags in one swoop. Have a cart ready and away you go."

"I can't do it all by myself," muttered Amos. "So Manvers is in it, is he? Who will stand in with me?"

"I will," said Number One. "Don't be afraid. I will support you, and if I see any chance of your failing us, or going wrong, depend upon me to shoot you! Oh yes, you may depend on me and Mr. Ricketts."

Amos did not quite like this decision. But he was in the toils, and could not by any means escape.

"Ye needn't threaten me," he said meekly; "I'm not likely to hurt ye."

"Let him alone," said the man called Jack, quietly, to Number One, who had begun to warn Amos again. "He's not going to round on us. We will make his

fortune. Be steady, mind, Killby; don't lose your head, that's all!"

"I wish ye hadn't said that," remarked Amos, turning pale. "It's unlucky!"

"Why?" asked the cynic. "Are you going to be executed in the old style, with the axe? I should have said that a halter was more in your line."

"Drop it now!" cried Amos. "I tell ye I don't like it. A gipsy told me my death would be by beheading," he muttered.

Both his hearers smiled grimly.

"We'll insure you against *that*, anyway," said Number One. "Can't guarantee you perfect immunity from *all* chances of *hanging*, but your head is safe as a church! You are a simpleton to believe any fortune-teller like that!"

"Well, it sounds silly, don't it?" said Amos. "But she told Bill Martin *his* fortune, and it came nearly true."

"Nearly! Rubbish! Come, shut up this nonsense. Mind you keep your eyes open, Killby. Here's a sovereign meanwhile. Go round, look about, and if you should get dismissed or into any trouble, come to me. I'll pull you through, my boy."

This speech from Mr. Ricketts was some consolation to Amos, who was more at his ease after these preliminaries were settled, and his fears by degrees were allayed under the influence of his associates' presence and his own libations.

Later on he became somewhat difficult to manage, and his courage rose.

"I don't like this job. You've got me in your net, and I suppose you see that I'm in for it; but, mind ye, *this is the last time*. That's settled. No more for me; never no more after. D'ye hear?"

"Ay! this *shall* be the last. Our fortunes will be made, man; and you'll die a squire yet—mark my words! We'll take care of you, lad. Only stick to us, and, by Jingo, we'll stick to you—*anyway!*"

Jack accompanied this with a look which in a great measure detracted from the pleasure of the announced prospect. But Amos had gone too far to retreat. He fell into the toils, and thenceforth was at the mercy of the wreckers.

"Very well," he replied sulkily. "But first I must be put back. Then I will manage as well as I can. I must be off now."

So saying, he hurried away, as if to avoid any further argument, and returned to his lodgings in a very unenviable frame of mind. All his good resolutions were scattered. He was bound hand and foot to these men, who had led him on from small pilferings to great dishonesty, and now he was on the verge of a crime the possible consequences of which made him shudder.

The reckless indifference to life which his associates displayed amazed him. They had apparently no concern whether the engine-driver, fireman, or guard or passengers were killed or injured for life! He could not contemplate the destruction of a train with such cynical indifference. He had seen something of the results of accidents, and the scenes to which they led; and he trembled at the picture just presented to him!

But he was afraid to hint his fears to anyone, and thus burdened he awaited the development of events, nursing his revenge against Eldred personally, but shrinking from playing cat's-paw for murder and highway robbery. If he could only manage not to travel in the doomed train, his mind and body would be

more at ease. Perhaps he could arrange to divert the signals, and so escape all the risks of travelling in the Mail, or hanging about the track! This idea seemed an excellent one. He would suggest this to "Jack" Ricketts, and then he would, himself, be safe. There was plenty of time yet. Let him only get out this once more, and he wouldn't offend again!

So he flattered himself.

CHAPTER VI.

BOB ELDRED ON THE FOOT-PLATE—RUNNING THE
TRAIN—THE DRIVER'S BUSINESS—THE BURN-
ING BRIDGE.

WHILE these sinister companions were thus engaged in plotting destruction and robbery, Eldred was at home cheering his wife with the Superintendent's decision, and making her feel somewhat guilty when her husband's story of his fight and tumble into the "poodle" was told. She felt that she had caused the dispute, and as Amos fancied that he already had a grievance, she was somewhat alarmed at the news of the encounter, though she took care to hide her fears for her husband from him.

Amos, she knew of old, was somewhat weak and revengeful. She was aware that he did not bear a good character for steadiness in his work, and that complaints of loss of goods had been made against him. But she still believed in her influence over him, and fancied that if she interfered he would reform, and drop his animosity towards her husband. This was expecting rather too much from such a

character as Amos, but in her secret heart Mrs. Eldred believed she could influence any man if she really determined to do so, and she would save her husband, and reclaim her former lover!—a triumph very dear to her affectionate feminine heart.

It is unfortunate that in this world the interference of women should so often prove a source of mischief and misfortune. One might imagine that their kind assistance and sympathy would bring about a very different result. But in numerous cases, if not in the majority of instances, lovely woman interferes to little purpose, and often with mischievous consequences. The outcome of Mary Eldred's plans has yet to be seen.

Eldred was under no apprehension about the threats of Amos Killby. He despised the brakesman too heartily to permit him to disturb the pleasant thoughts that were once more centred on *Polyphemus*, which had for some few days been in the hands of strangers. The driver saw her come in with a train, and hugged himself with the anticipation that next day he would be running that same trip, on duty again!

Nor was he disappointed. At six o'clock the well-known call came, and Eldred tumbled out. His wife was dressed as soon as he—ay, sooner; and had his breakfast ready in a twinkling. A can of tea and his dinner in a basket were ready by the time he was. His thick pilot jacket was hanging behind the door, brushed and tidy. True, it was a trifle greasy; but, then, that was professional, and Eldred was not in Sunday trim.

But he was well dressed for such business: a peaked cloth cap, a thick blue serge suit, a neck-wrapper which permitted his shirt-collar to be seen—a white collar, too! But the shirt was of flannel.

Strong well-fitting boots completed his outward costume. His watch was suspended in his pocket by a silver chain, on which hung a small pewter charm—a “fetish:” a head, apparently, of Medusa, which had been given to Eldred by a youth whom he had permitted to mount his engine at the station sidings; and with it hung a shilling which had been bestowed upon him by a young lady—a very pretty girl—for some unexpected assistance with luggage on a crowded platform. Mrs. Eldred was, of course, very curious about the latter gift, to which a kind of romantic halo attached in later years. Eldred, being somewhat superstitious, regarded the shilling as lucky, and related to his wife the following additional facts as proof of it:—

One day, when on duty at a remote country station, Eldred found himself absolutely without money, and desiring some refreshment was tempted to change his lucky shilling. His fireman was left in charge of the engine; and being hungry and thirsty, Eldred was deliberating upon his chances of tea, and regretting the necessity for changing his “luck,” when on the cinder-path to the station he perceived something shining. He stooped, and found the glittering object was a half-sovereign, with which he, his mate, and the goods guard subsequently regaled themselves. Since that day he has regarded the shilling with increased veneration. There is a curious sequel to this tale, as will be related. The donors of those gifts met and married.

On resuming work, Eldred found himself on the “lighting list” with *Polyphemus*, and was very pleased to have the engine again. He was most careful to inspect her, and very solicitous about his fire: the

fireman, indeed, thought him particularly "fussy," and was inclined to grumble at being ordered about so much.

Everything being satisfactory, Eldred and his mate took the engine out, and backed her down to the train. He had to wait a while until the line was cleared for the loco' sidings, and as he waited he caught sight of Amos, who seemed greatly occupied by his thoughts. But he also perceived the driver, and relieved his feelings by shaking his fist, and then transferring the thumb to the tip of his nose, extending his fingers. Eldred merely "chucked" a lump of coal at the scorner and passed on.

The train had already been drawn up by the platform. It was a fast train, and had been nicely cleaned, washed, and brushed up at the depôt. But there were several points to be attended to before it would be permitted to go out.

Had the weather been wintry, for instance, the foot-warmers would have to be looked to, and the lamps lighted up with the oil-gas which is so extensively used. Some day our engines will be supplied with oil-fuel, which has already been experimented upon by the Great Eastern Railway ; but the time is not yet. The electric light had not been introduced into Eldred's train at that time ; but the company had almost done away with the old dingy lamps.

The valve lifted just a trifle, to indicate that the pressure was at "blowing-off" point. Eldred was not anxious for the steam to escape "on a holiday" altogether. He wanted it to do its work first, or warm the water, and then if it escaped up the chimney, very well. He counted his "coaches," and found that he had twelve well-filled carriages behind him. He had

looked to couplings and machinery ; and was, like all good drivers, confident in himself. He knew that his fire was properly in combustion *this* time ; that no make-believe glow was underneath, but a sound well-burnt fire, with a clean ash-pan. He was determined that nothing should interfere with him on that trip.

The continuous brake was tested and found acting. A last look round the engine, and Eldred mounted the steps. His fireman, Ned, had already swept up the dust, and sprinkled some water on the foot-plate, on which he was standing. He had also twirled the tender-brake on and off to see that it worked properly, then the blower was put on gently. The driver was ready at his post. The steam stood at 40°, and was just escaping.

"Right away !" cried the fireman.

A touch to the whistle as his right hand seeks his left on the regulator handle, which is immediately opened. A few sonorous puffs, gently, not too much at once ; feel your coaches on, and don't jerk your passengers. Then pull back your reversing lever to expand your steam, and open your regulator farther. The steam escapes from the chimney with less noise. Away, away, rattling over the bridges, above the red roofs of thickly planted houses, with scanty washing hung out from window to window, peeps into narrow courts and alleys, and backyards of repulsive smallness ; ragged children, loafing men, chattering women, all passed in a few seconds, to be replaced by their counterparts. Then less stifling air, and more healthy breezes ; houses more scattered, trees, lawns, gardens, early lawn-tennis players ; fond lovers under a tree ; servant-maids in upper rooms busy about beds ; family below in breakfast-room, with windows opening to the lawn ; dog-cart or pony-carriage waiting to

convey business men and guests to the station for the "up" train; and every now and then a hedge or embankment cutting off all prospects save in front, where the rails extend in four lines, apparently meeting a long way off, and seemingly setting Euclid's definition as to parallels at utter defiance.

But Eldred and his mate pay scant attention even to the hay-makers and the merry School Treat. They extend their hands, engine-man fashion, in acknowledgment of many waving handkerchiefs and shrill cheers from the children. But signals must be attended to, and with a rush, a cloud of dust, a whistle, which makes the nervous jump and stop their ears, Eldred has cleared Wexthorpe, a cloud of jealous pieces of paper, and a dusty storm, vainly trying to overtake the speeding train. Away! away!

On, across the river by the light lattice-bridge, whose tarred timbers, baulks, and sleepers are dotted with many a singeing cinder. On beyond the stream, where the cutting is gay with wild-flowers and yellow gorse, and lively with butterflies and great bees, which latter hum angrily at *Polyphemus*, and seek to catch him up in his headlong race, to sting him down.

Then a gradual slackening of speed, the turning brake, the whiz of the continuous air-brake; and "gently as a sucking-dove" the monster *Polyphemus* comes to a standstill at the station platform. A little oil, a few shovelfuls of coal, the back of a grimed hand touches the cranks. All is well—no undue heating is perceptible. Right away!

So the journey of one hundred and twenty miles is accomplished. Sometimes faster, sometimes more slowly; through divers counties, by so many churches, schools, asylums, or a distant prison. Up

hills with a loud beat and slow movement ; on the level, "notched up" again, speeding smoothly to the declivity, where steam is shut off, and the gear released as the *Polyphemus* swings down the grade, shouting with loud "Ha" under the bridges, grumbling over them, and curving, grinding the rails, around the segment of the railway circle to Swallowton. There his rest is won, and he will remain under inspection until again needed to pull the evening fast train home.

"Done it neat, mate," said Eldred, as he compared his silver watch with the station clock. "Just half a minute in hand."

"First-rate," replied Ned, as he descended to uncouple the engine, which he and Eldred would now hand over to the "relief men," to coal, and water, and shed, while they retired to their mid-day meal and the cosy—if warm—cabin to meet other drivers compare notes, give and accept hints, or exchange arguments, banter, and experiences.

So *Polyphemus* was led away to his stable, to be groomed and fed, preparatory to his run home, and his coachman and footman amused themselves in the cabin, the shed, or the streets, until the time when he must be again sought and brought out.

The run down had been uneventful—an ordinary experience: the return trip was destined to be somewhat more exciting and memorable. *Polyphemus* was ready: neither he nor his conductors dreamed of the trial ahead.

A soft warm evening: a gentle breeze, not sufficient to interfere with the movement of our hero even if it blew across his iron track, which was clear of all obstructions. Nothing happened until the train was nearing the incline on which the rapid run of the

morning had been performed, and up which on one fatal night *Polyphemus* had been unable to move properly.

"What's that, Ned?" asked Eldred, as something shot into the air: glowing in the gloom which by this time had fallen on the landscape. Great massive clouds hung, like inked bunches of cotton-wool, high in a firmament, almost destitute of cirrus or strata, but rich in pyramid and mountain, and rounded, soft masses of cumulus.

"I suspect it's the Bannister heavy goods coming up," replied Ned. "She's due somewhere about now."

"Ah!" said Eldred. "She's throwin' her fire pretty well. Shouldn't like not to be insured in my hay this evenin'. She must have a big load! Who's on the job?"

"Ben Carless, I b'lieve," replied the fireman.

"Shouldn't wonder," assented Eldred; "he'll get into mischief one o' these days. My socks! Look at the cinders. I hope he won't burn his lagging."

The laborious beat of the goods train soon became audible, and then the train itself became visible, as *Polyphemus*, with easy slide, and just a suspicion of the brakes on, came whirring by. Sparks flew from the engine, the front plate of the smoke-box seemed red-hot, and at every exhaust the fire glowed more fiercely.

"He'll do something," muttered Eldred, as he checked *Polyphemus* to stop at the small station at the foot of the incline. Then a quick run to Wexthorpe and home.

"Come on, guard," cried Eldred impatiently; "we're two minutes behind now! hurry them up."

"All right, Bob; it's an old lady and her parrot; she wants him labelled. Ready in a minute! Now then! Any more goin' on there? Right!"

A hand-lamp, slid from red to green and white, was waved in advance : *Polyphemus* stepped out boldly : two lanterns were swung by the guards to each other as they leaned out. Eldred looked back on his side ; all clear there ; the guards popped in, the speed increased. A curious glow was visible in front.

Eldred felt a queer sensation round his heart—what did that redness mean ?

“What dost make o’ that, mate ?” he asked as he crossed over to the near side to inspect the curious glow. “Ain’t fire, is it ?”

“Looks uncommon like it,” replied Ned. “Nor I shouldn’t be much surprised if Ben hadn’t gone and lighted the gorse with his irruptions !”

“’Pon my sivey, I b’lieve thou’st hit it, Ned. Well, we’ve no powder behind us, but there’s plenty of paint ! It’ll be a scorcher, I doubt. Did ever I tell thee o’ the red hand I saw hereaway ?”

“I heard of it,” replied Ned, cautiously. “By jingo, mate ! this fire’s getting on lively.”

“Don’t suppose it will stop us, eh ? But I don’t half like it, I tell thee !” Eldred suddenly shut off steam, whistled sharply, and then applied his brake. *Polyphemus* sobered down immediately, and strolled gently on in the direction of the burning gorse.

It was a fine sight. Dry as tinder, the heather crackled and blazed high up the embankment. The breeze eddying across carried a couple of burning flakes over, and the yellow-studded cutting on the opposite side began also to show what it could do. The glare and heat were tremendous, and as the flames were rapidly advancing Eldred deemed it only prudent to proceed.

The guards and passengers held a consultation. Some of the latter suggested pouring water from the

engine on the blaze, but no one could approach it. The only way was to beat it out, or let it burn out, and as there seemed not much chance of the latter, the decision came to was, "Go ahead!"

Just then a guard who had run along the down line in comparative immunity came rushing madly back.

"If you mean to go, be off at once! The bridge is on fire, and may not bear the down train! We must warn Wexthorpe, mate! Go on. If we don't, the mail will pitch into the river. She's due nearly now, and can't see for the curve of the trees, maybe!"

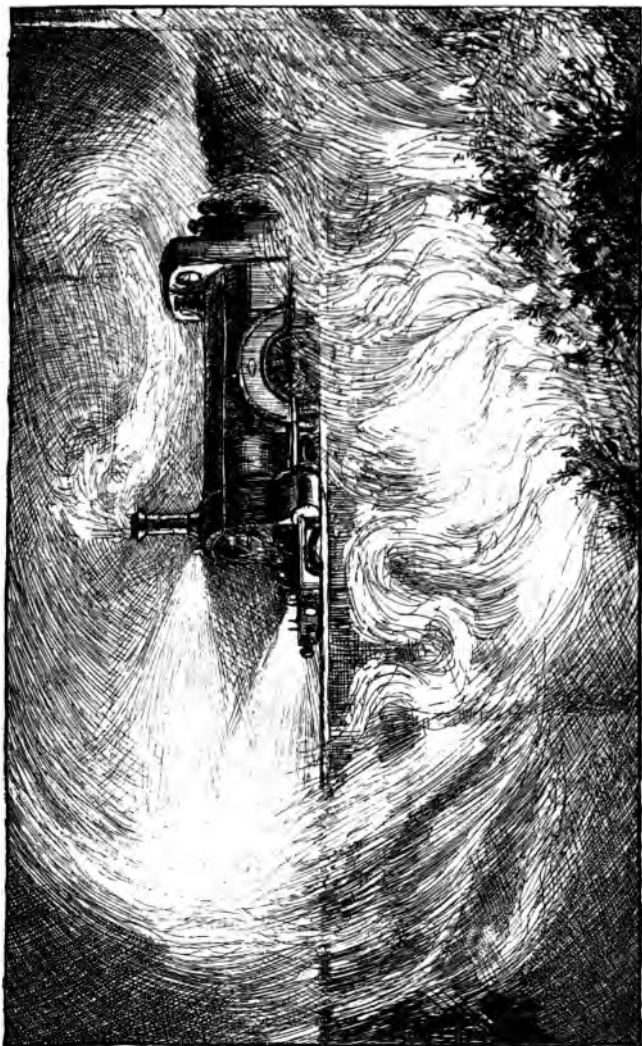
"Well, here goes then; I can't leave the train. Run back, Alf! Get in. Tell the passengers nothin', d'ye mind! I'll risk it—anyway, we'll stop the mail!"

In another minute pressure was on; the engine responded nobly. The fierce beat of the pistons was audible above the hoarse roaring of the flames. Twenty, thirty, forty, fifty miles an hour. Whew! A furnace indeed was in front.

A demoniacal crackling, splitting, roaring ensued. *Polyphemus* darted into the smoke and flame, and rushed on. Windows cracked, paint shrivelled; two faces were scorched—for two imprudent travellers looked out just at the wrong moment—Eldred and his mate got blackened worse than usual, and partly choked by the dense fumes, but neither flinched, nor did bold *Polyphemus* shrink! The glass roofs of the vans and weather-board were shattered and cracked, and at the sound of breaking glass screams were heard. The green parrot uttered an irreverent exclamation; but the train was safe over the burning timbers, and through the valley of fire, thankfully slackening speed.

"Mind the signal, Ned; I'm for the mail."

Eldred then opened his whistle. The deep tone



CROSSING THE BURNING BRIDGE (*see p. 70*).

men the intelligence fell like a thunderbolt. Their plans were upset, the carefully laid schemes of months were buried, apparently, in the bed of the stream with the remains of the unfortunate engine-men who had been hurried, without any warning, into eternity. To Mary Eldred the news brought a sickening sensation of terror, until she learned particulars. To others it spoke of expense, and caused "language." To Ben Carless it meant something serious. To *Polyphemus* and his friends it resulted in a most curious adventure, which, in its turn, culminated in a tragedy!

Next day, when the excitement consequent upon the accident and the stoppage of the traffic had in some degree abated, three men were seated in the "Rising Moon" public-house, discussing their nefarious business.

"Here's a pretty go!" remarked one man. "Now, Jack, where are your fine plans?"

"Where yours will never be in your life—in the brains," responded cynical Jack. "I suppose you imagine the game is up because our men are drowned? Bah! There's others to be got, you may depend!"

"Ay!" said Amos Killby, who again was present. "That's all very well, and true too; but time's an object. We can't spare the time. Manvers [the dead driver] took a precious while, and some money, to turn to us. We sha'n't get another such a pal!"

"No, that we sha'n't," assented Number One. "So I says to Jack, 'Here's a pretty go; what's your plans now?' I says."

"I daresay you'd like to give the job up entirely, wouldn't ye?" growled Jack, the "gentleman" of the gang. "Didn't my letter put you in again, man?" he asked roughly, turning to Amos.

"Yes ; it 'put me back' in more senses than one," replied the victim. "I'm degraded !"

"Well, ye never had but only *one* sense, and ye were degraded before," muttered the cynic. "So *you* haven't hurt, and ye haven't common gratitude. Bah, you idiot !"

"Gratitude for what, I should like to know? What have I ever had but kicks and abuse ever since I went in with you? Mind ye don't drive me too far !"

"Oh, you'd betray us, would ye? Then look out for squalls ! As sure as you turn on us, you'll die to a certainty before we're lagged ! You're never let out of sight. Ah, you think you'll be clever, but you're watched day and night, Master Killby."

This threat was quite sufficient, as the speaker had no doubt it would be. Amos was completely cowed, and submissively expressed his willingness to do as he was bidden.

"Very well. Now you are reasonable. Find out when the 'specie' will start, who will take charge, where the plunder is, and in what form it is. You may also point out the guards to Number One here—in fact, find all particulars, and be correct. Our work will be done under the rose."

Amos made no further protests. He was in the toils, and so meshed that no struggling could release him. His associates had some powerful friends, or their letter to the superintendent would have had no effect, and he (Amos) would not have been reinstated, in however low a position, so soon. This was one of the puzzles to Amos. Who were these men? At times their conversation was of a superior tone, and intimated some acquaintance with society. They had plenty of money, too, dressed well on occasions, and sported rings and trinkets ! Who were they ?

It was on a race-course, when he was on race-train duty, that Amos had first met these men, and having become acquainted by the accident of taking shelter in the same booth, they improved upon it, and actually lost money on a race to the brakesman. This success encouraged him, and on subsequent occasions they advised him beneficially. Thus, when they required the inevitable *quid pro quo*, Amos could not refuse, and several robberies had taken place—notably a valuable consignment which was in transit from an exhibition. There was no evidence of this unique vase having been stolen, but it “disappeared”! The company pleaded Carriers’ Act and non-liability, and were held “not responsible under the circumstances.”

So immunity begat greater frauds, until the despatch of specie by a night train, of which information had reached them by some underhand means, determined them to make a grand *coup*. The plot was cleverly arranged, but the sudden death of their accomplices, the driver and his mate, somewhat staggered the conspirators. Still the prize was too valuable to relinquish.

After the inquest, at which Eldred and his mate, with his guards, were in attendance as witnesses, the *Polyphemus* somehow became known as an “unlucky” engine. There are, on some lines, locomotives which, for one reason or another, be it age, faulty construction, old principles, or some such cause, have been condemned in the minds of engine-men, who have their fancies and superstitions. Of the superstitious class was Bob Eldred, and he had attributed all his misfortunes to the figure which he had seen on the up metals, extending a blood-stained hand and arm!

In vain Mary, his wife, had laughed at him. He

tenaciously clung to his version; in vain in the drivers' cabin the men laughed, jeered, or sometimes capped his narrative with palpably impossible tales. He was unconverted, and actually impressed some of his mates.

"I tell ye all, I saw it! There! That's plain. Don't go for to say I couldn't, 'cause I *did*. The place is hanted—th' ingin's hanted."

"Hanted! Who ever heard of a hanted ingin!" exclaimed a main-line man derisively.

"I have," replied a deep voice in the corner—that of a man who had been on shunting duty—"I have! It's true also."

"What was it, sonny?" inquired another, with a wink at his comrades.

"It was a coupled ingin, and coupled forward, and ran on the Junction line."

"No, I mean the spurrit," said the questioner.

"A animal—a great animal which rose up several times in the six-foot, and clung to the framin' of the ingin. No matter how fast Fred Barnes was drivin', the animal cotched him up, and sot astride in a black shadow like, on the boiler!"

There was silence for a moment. The decided tone and evident *bona fides* of the speaker impressed his sceptical audience; but they knew better than to accept the statement in full.

"I daresay he did see *something*; where was it?"

"Just outside Laxey's stoneyard. Sometimes it come sudden, sometimes never at all. If ever you're on that turn, Bob, you look out."

Eldred nodded, and would have replied had not another driver struck in with a loud guffaw.

"Haw, haw!" laughed George; "ever see it moonlight nights?"

"Often," replied the deep-voiced man in a triumphant tone. "Many a while!"

"So've I," assented the scoffer—and this confirmation surprised the majority; but the manner of George seemed strange.

"Well, did it hurt ye, George?"

"No; it came like a big shadow of a beast, and leaped right on the ingin as we turned the curve by the yard! It never made no noise, but just vanished. I tell ye it startled me at first. Haw, haw, haw!"

The laugh which concluded the narrative was hardly in keeping with the solemnity of the subject; Eldred thought.

"Ay, ye may laugh," replied the ghost-seer; "but who can tell what it were?"

"Yes," assented Eldred, "that's the point."

"Well, I can," retorted George. "It is the shadow of the big stone unicorn, perched on the wall in front of the cutting-shed, and on moonlight nights, or when the gas is strong, the shadow is on the line as clear as you please—and it jumps up on the ingin! Haw, haw!"

His laugh was infectious, and the shout at the expense of the ghost-seer nearly unanimous.

"Howsumdever, there's queer things about ingins," said George; "that I don't deny. Sammy Daley knows well that ingins is tricky. Look at *Polyphemus*! She gets out mostly every time, and Sammy says *he* couldn't manage *his* ingin durin' Lent-time, not a bit. It come all right after Bank Holiday though, at Easter!"

"Just so," replied another; "and wasn't it Jos Brown as couldn't run the *Mercury* on the Toonock line to Hightoft?"

"Yes. We all had a try at her. She wouldn't

go any way right ; and at last no one liked to have her at all. We couldn't make time on that piece, so the boss was for smashin' her up."

"But he didn't," remarked Eldred, shortly.

"No, he didn't, and for why? I up and told him the truth to his face in the shed—

"‘She's too good for the trip,’ says I, ‘*and she's aware of it!*’ Put her on a good piece, and let her race a bit. Give her to me,’ I says, ‘and I'll make an ingin of her!’

"‘She isn't fit to turn a threshing machine,’ says he. ‘I'm tired of the reports about her.’

"‘*It's her blessed pride!*’ I says. ‘Give her something she can do well and proper, and she'll do it, governor.’

"Well, the boss he looks at me, and, says he—

"‘You want this turn for yourself, I see?’

"‘No,’ says I, ‘let me have that ingin on it two days, and she'll go like a lamb. It's her pride!’ Well, he did, mates, as I axed him; and I saw her fixed proper, and oiled. We had a trial at night between Jenningsbury and Erfton—a clear level bit, as you know—forty-four mile, with scarce a hill on it!"

"An' she went with ye?" was the general question.

"Went with me! I believe ye! We, the superintendent, the foreman, me and Bill Sniffles, did that bit on the *Mercury* in thirty-nine minutes and four seconds; and back again, after crossing over, in thirty-eight minutes down the bit o' slope. Went with us! Why, what do *you* think? and ever since she's been runnin' fast trains like an angel! It was just her pride as did it!"

"Well, I'm bothered!" remarked Eldred. "But every ingin-man knows that ingins must be humoured, like Christians, and treated gentle. Can't run an ingin to a standstill any more'n a horse, and not suffer for it! They're almost human animals sometimes, and has their feelin's, their feedin'-times, their days off, their bad tempers, and sulky fits like men and women—only they can't speak nor scold!"

"They can blow ye up, though," grunted George, with the inevitable "Haw, haw!" in conclusion.

"That's true, mate," replied Eldred. "But it's time up, now, and I'm goin' home. Good-evenin', mates."

So saying, he disappeared, and returned to his engine and to his home, where Mary was waiting for him.

When he had quitted the cabin, one man remarked—

"Well, say what ye like, boys, *Polyphemus* is a misfortunate ingin, and Bob he'll find it out some o' these days: mind my words. She's never done any good, and though she can run she's always in mischief."

"So she is," assented the rest. The party broke up by degrees after many anecdotes of the line had been related and commented upon, and the evening closed in uneventfully.

Meantime Eldred had been received by his anxious wife. She was excited, and her manner immediately attracted his attention.

"What's up, missus? Thee's a bit jumpy 'bout somethin', eh?"

"Oh, Bob, we must leave here. We have to go next week!"

"Leave here! Go next week!" repeated Eldred, sinking into a chair, on which he left a black impression—the cover being new and white. "Go! Who says so?"

"The foreman told me himself. He came by this evening, and said, 'When your good man comes in, tell him he's to leave on to-morrow week, the 30th, and——'"

"But what's the matter, lass? Didn't he tell thee? I've done nought for dismissal."

"Dismissal, Bob dear! Oh, no; we're goin' to London! To the head traffic, Mr. Arnold says."

"The main line! Not the expresses, Molly? Why, woman alive, if they promote me with *Polyphemus*, it's a fine thing. I'll go and see Arnold this minute."

He rose hastily, and did not heed the lamentations of his young wife—

"Oh, Bob, you've ruined my chair-cover for ever!"

* * * * *

"It's right enough, lass," said Eldred, as he re-entered his room. "We're to go, and in place of poor Jack Manvers, I understand, and run the main traffic to Bounstal. I'll have a night turn on that job, and thee'll be alone, Molly. That's a bit up again' it!"

"Well, I'm not afraid," she replied, bravely, though her heart sank a little. "You'll find me when you come home in the morning. No; wash your face first, Bob dear. I can't kiss such a mucky man as that! I'll have supper meantime."

So Bob's affection was temporarily put aside; but when he came down again after a "good sluicing and sloshing," as he said, his wife did not wait to be asked, but kissed him loyally.

"Thee's a good lass, when all's said and done, Molly. Seen Amos lately?"

"No, Bob; 'course not. He won't trouble us any more, you jealous old goose. Eat your supper, lad."

"Jealous goose, am I, Molly? Well, maybe; but I'll cackle a bit over Amos Killby if he troubles thee! And I'd a'most wring thy neck if thee encourages of him. I would!"

"Oh, Bob, you quite frighten me!" - exclaimed Mrs. Eldred. "The idea of your thinking of such a thing! Amos and me are no more friends, Bob dear."

"Precious good job too, Molly. Send us the jug yonder. Water, is it? Well, then, I'll have a drop o' beer to drink thy health this time. It's only once in a way, off duty, lass."

This request surprised Mrs. Eldred, for her husband hardly ever touched any stimulant of any kind. But she obediently went to fetch the beer, and Eldred somewhat impatiently waited her return.

After five minutes he rose irritably, and taking his cap, sallied forth in search of her; but on reaching the public-house, after a rapid walk, he learned from the girl at the bar that Mrs. Eldred had "been and gone a couple of minutes."

"Gone! Then I must ha' missed her. Good-night."

He strode out, and took his way home again by a shorter cut down a lane in a not very attractive locality, by a bone-boiling factory of unpleasant odours. Nothing but the need for hurry would have induced the engine-driver to traverse this lane, which was a short cut to the "Rising Moon" public-house. At

the end of the alley he perceived his wife hurrying home, and at once gave chase, anger surging in his heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DOMESTIC SCENE—AN UNFORTUNATE MEETING— BOB ELDRED IN TROUBLE—A SURPRISE.

ROBERT ELDRED was decidedly out of temper, and he did not attempt to check his anger. He thought he had cause, for with his wife he had perceived a man whom he believed was Amos Killby, and therefore he was inclined to be jealous. So he strode on, and overtook his spouse at his own door.

"Where's thou been so long, Molly? Gossipin', I see. Who with? Come, speak up!"

"Why, Bob, what a temper you're in, to be sure! Gossiping indeed! I only went to the 'Feathers,' and——"

"Don't 'ee tell me a lie, lass! I saw thee myself talkin' to that good-for-nothin' scamp, Killby. Go in. I'll talk to thee inside."

Mrs. Eldred hesitated. She did not at all like her husband's manner; he seemed so fierce, and his words were ominous of violence.

"What's the matter, Robert? Are you really angry?" she asked, smiling in a forced and nervous manner, very different from her usual bright look, as she entered the cottage.

"Never thee mind; go in. I'll say what I've to say and do what I've to do inside."

Mary's heart sank within her. She knew her

husband's violent temper, and for the first time began to feel alarmed.' But she hesitated no more. Nerving herself, she stepped on as boldly as she could in front of Eldred, and placing the beer-jug on the table with trembling hand, sat down with as much outward carelessness as she dared to assume.

"Well, Robert, what is it?"

"What is it? *This* is it. Thee've been out to meet that Amos! Now if thee do it again I'll make thee repent it! D'ye hear?"

"Yes, I hear," she replied, rising proudly. "I hear as mean a speech as ever I heard! Make me repent it, ay! You'll make me repent marryin' you soon! Meet Amos! Why, you silly, if I wanted to see that fellow, couldn't I choose my own time? Robert Eldred, you're a pitiful goose. Amos! Why, I never liked him in the old days, and it ain't likely that I should think of him now. You born silly!"

"Then why was 'ee so long at the 'Feathers,' then?" retorted Eldred, who was surprised at his gentle wife's defiant manner, and secretly admired her for it.

"How could I help it? They kept me waitin', and I hurried back by the lane so as not to keep *you* waitin'. Then Killby came out, and says, 'So Robert's goin' to London, is he? Well, I wish ye joy! Maybe he won't like it! But I'm on again at work, and will see you sometimes.'"

"And that's all?"

"That's about all. He was very polite in his manner, and wanted to know on what turn you would be up there."

"And that's all?" asked the engine-driver again.

"Of course it's all," replied his wife. "What more do you think there is? There's your beer; drink it, Bob, and finish your supper."

She handed him the jug ; but he, without attempting to take it, dashed it out of her hand to the floor, with an oath on his lips.

The pretty present fell with a crash ; the beer splashed the bit of carpet, the wall, and the chairs. The unpleasant savour of the liquor filled the room, and Mrs. Eldred turned pale.

"You're mad !" she gasped. "Stark mad ! Lord preserve us ! Robert, be quiet !"

"Ay, I'll be quiet when I've cracked yon rascal's skull ! Now, mind me—if ever you speak to Killby again I'll punch the' ! See t't !"

"Punch *me* ! You dare not ! You coward ! You're a fool, Bob Eldred ; and so am I to have married such a lunatic ! Lay a finger on me, and you'll repent it every day you live. Amos, indeed : *that* for Amos !"

She snapped her fingers almost in her angry husband's face, and marched out of the room.

"I'll smash his face when I meet him," growled the driver. "What a mess ! I'll go down to the 'Feathers' and have a glass. Phew !"

With some slightly expressed disgust, Eldred, feeling somewhat ashamed of his violence, quitted the room and the cottage, and took his way to the "Feathers."

Fate is sometimes unkind to us. The engine-driver had hardly left his home when he perceived the well-known form of his adversary, as he regarded him, standing beneath the gas-lamp at the corner where shone the "Rising Moon." Two other men were in conversation with Amos, and they appeared confidential.

Eldred gazed at them for a moment or two, and, muttering something, turned in the direction of the

inn, at the door of which the men were standing. He approached in his usual steady manner, walking firmly, his hands in his pockets, clenched tightly, ready for action, if necessary.

"Here," he cried. "Amos Killby ; I'm a talkin' to thee. Come here, lad."

"That's the engine-driver I told you of, who has been promoted into Manvers' berth," whispered Amos to his friends.

"Dost hear?" shouted Eldred ; "I want thee."

"Well, speak up ; I can hear ye—driver."

"If ever I see thee speakin' to my Molly again, I knock thy fat head off! So take advice, thou oaf!"

"Your Molly! Well, ye can keep her in a glass case for all I care. Yer not fit to lick her boots! Get out of sight, and take your Molly with ye, ye goods breaker! Lor', won't there be some smashes when he gets on the fast runs! Oh my!"

Amos, secure in the presence of his friends, could jeer at his rival ; but Eldred was furious, and, ignoring the bystanders, rushed at Amos. A fierce struggle ensued, and after a few blows had been given and exchanged, Eldred, who was by far the more powerful man of the two, dealt his opponent a heavy blow and sent him staggering against the kerbstone.

He knocked his heel against it, and grasping vainly for some support, fell with a terrible sickening thud on the pathway, and lay without sense or motion.

"I believe he's killed him!" cried Jack the cynical to his companion. "You've done a nice job, driver ; help us to lift him up."

Number One also assisted, and Amos, still insensible, was carried, bleeding and motionless, into the "Rising Moon."

"He's got a nasty one," remarked the girl. "Which of you beauties did that? One of you will swing for it!"

"He—he—ain't dead," growled Eldred, who was struggling to appear unconcerned. "He's only got a rap on the head—had many a worse mysen."

"Then you've a thick skull," remarked Jack. "The man's dying, I believe. Go for a doctor, Martha."

"That I will, and a constable too!" said the young woman, glancing at Eldred.

"You leave the constable alone at present," said Jack. "Fetch the doctor at once. Quick!"

"He ain't far off," she answered. "Ugh! you brute!" she whispered to Eldred. "You'll be hanged, that's one comfort."

The engine-driver was too much confused and dumbfounded to make any reply. Had he really killed the man? If so, he ran a very considerable risk of penal servitude. The blow was not intended to kill, of course, but he was aware that the circumstances were all against him. His jealous temper and his threats, his defiance to the injured man, would tell against him, even though his wife could not bear witness.

There was silence in the room while the girl was absent. The ticking of the clock was very audible from the outside; inside, the occupants seemed hardly breathing as they contemplated the still, inert, blood-stained face and form of Amos Killby. He had been laid on his back on the horsehair sofa, a patched and slippery piece of furniture, bursting at the corners, one foot supported by a piece of firewood. The picture above this couch was a daub of primitive German lithographic art, and represented Cain and

Abel in highly-coloured costumes of loose make, without hose ; Cain peering anxiously into Abel's face with a grin on his features, ruddy and stout.

This ghastly caricature fascinated the engine-driver. He began to compare himself to Cain, and half expected the clouds, as in the picture, to open, and the terrible question to be addressed to him—

“Where is thy brother?”

Robert Eldred was, as we know, highly superstitious, and fully credited the startling tales of ghosts, etc., to which curious coincidences lent a semblance of colour and a substratum of truth. He therefore regarded the fearful daub on the wall as a terrible warning, and associated it in his mind with the sentence of condemnation pronounced upon Belshazzar. By the time the waiting-woman had returned with a doctor—a local and not very celebrated practitioner—Eldred was in a terrible fright, and anxious to speedily efface himself.

This manœuvre the two companions of Amos would in no wise countenance. They took care to keep the engine-driver in the room during the somewhat lengthened examination by the medical man. Amos never stirred ; he displayed no signs of life, and the greatest anxiety was visible on all faces.

“Well, doctor,” at length asked Jack the cynical, a well-dressed gentleman, with whose projects we are already acquainted, “is that poor fellow dead?”

“Not yet. He's got a rap on the skull which may be concussion of the brain. He's had a bad thump, and I wouldn't care to stand in the shoes of the man who hit him. Which of ye did it?”

“I did,” replied Eldred. “We were wrestlin' and I hit him ; he fell against the kerb and down he went.”

"That accounts for the lump on his cheek ; you hit hard, my man—a murderous blow. The consequences may be very serious."

"Well, I sha'n't run away," muttered Eldred. "Why did he go and chatter with my missus, then ?"

"But," whispered the waiting-woman, who seemed considerably distressed at Amos' condition, "is no one to speak to your wife ? She isn't so grand as the queen, is she ?"

Eldred made no answer ; he was almost crushed. This was a fine concomitant to his promotion. He moved towards the door.

"Go your ways, Mr. Eldred," said Martha. "The end of this business is hanging over you !"

Eldred blenched. There was a, perhaps unintentional, pause after the word "hanging." He shuddered, and with a glance at the still insensible Amos, left the room, and then fled away.

He could not go home. He did not dare to face his wife. What would she say when she heard his story ? She knew his angry feelings towards Amos, and he had been an intimate acquaintance, had loved her, and would have married her. No woman is ever quite indifferent to a man who has respectfully addressed to her the language of love.

After a while, finding that solitude was worse than scolding, he went home, and found his wife sitting up for him. She made no remark as he entered, and seemed not to notice him at all ; but her glance saw that he was greatly disturbed : that his appearance was disordered, his manner strange and gloomy.

"It's the engine," she thought. "*Polyphemus* is unlucky. Perhaps we'll be quit of it up in London."

Eldred said nothing. He had anticipated a

remonstrance, but none came : he had almost hoped for a reconciliation, but his wife made no advances. She sat sewing and silent. This irritated him.

"Ain't tho' never going to speak agen, Molly?"

"Ay am I, to a sensible man : not to one who talks of 'punches.' I'm thinkin' of going home to-morrow."

"Goin' home!" echoed Eldred. "Why, what ails thee?"

"Oh! nothing particular : but I don't want to stay and be bullied : that's all."

"Then if that's all, thou'lt have to stop here. So don't fluster thyself, Molly; thy duty's to thy husband."

"Ay, *when* he's a husband, and not a 'puncher'! But what's come to you?—your lip's cut—your forehead's bruised. Been fightin'?"

"Ay! thee's hit it."

"Fightin'! Well, that's pretty conduct for a man o' your place. Talkin' o' that, Mr. Rundle was here to-night : the time-keeper."

"Rundle : what does he want?"

"He wanted you ; there's some special excursion train, and you're booked for it. Day after to-morrow mornin'."

"With *Polyphemus*, I s'pose. At when?"

"Five o'clock. It's the excursion to London."

"Wilt come too, lass? It's Exhibition!"

"Come to London?" she exclaimed. "Oh, Bob!"

"I'll take thee, Molly; take thee to Exhibition, too. So put out thy fine dress, and we'll find some un to take care o' thee while I polish up a bit, and meet thee. Come, it's a bargain?"

"Yes, Bob dear. There, that's enough; let me look at your poor lip. Promise me, now, you'll never be jealous of Amos again. Promise!"

Eldred shivered. Someone was "walking over his grave!"

"Yes," he replied in a low voice. "I'll promise that—I'll promise thee that! I'll never see him again, I doubt."

"Very well," said Mrs. Eldred, somewhat surprised at her husband's manner. "Then I'll just go; and mind you are ready in the morning."

The night passed sadly for our driver, though: his thoughts were with Amos. Was he dead?

Next day the driver had some short trips, and at four o'clock the following morning he walked over to the shed to look after *Polyphemus*. "She" had behaved splendidly that day: had steamed to perfection, and quite recovered "her" character in Eldred's eyes. The engine-driver was consequently pleased, and as he had heard nothing unpleasant concerning Amos, he felt more at ease.

Mrs. Eldred was to meet him at the station with some acquaintances, and the guard would secure them a compartment not far from the engine nor his own van. Five o'clock struck: all the arrangements had been carried out perfectly, and at nine a.m. the excursion, after many stoppages and some shunting, reached London.

The half-sleepy passengers turned out into the bustling station amidst well-dressed men and women—chiefly the former, who were coming up early from their suburban residences. Some were most respectable tradesmen; some bank cashiers, who had "the safe keys," and were compelled to be early and in advance of their fellows: a motley crowd; and as Eldred leaned on the rail of the locomotive, watching the people, and conversing with the guard on the question of breakfast for their friends, a man whose appearance

seemed familiar to the engine-driver passed. The person in question had descended from a local train, and was someone of consequence, because porters saluted him.

"Who's he, Tom?" asked Eldred of his guard.

"Oh, he's Mr. Ricketts, a City gentleman—a finance-ear, I'm told he is. A reg'lar toff."

"Well, I've seen him in shady places, I think."

"Under the trees in 'High Park,' p'raps? He's not likely to be in your part of the country, man!"

"Maybe not; but I was thinkin' I'd seen him in company with another swell—and who do you think?"

"The boss?"

"No! With Amos Killby, the brakesman."

"What! with *that* lurcher? You'd better buy a pair o' spectacles, Bob. Mr. Ricketts and Amos! The British lion and a Chinaman's cat! Well, I'm off; back out now, Bob. We'll meet the rest at the Exhibition after a while."

Polyphemus obediently backed out with his long train of carriages, and the speculations concerning Mr. Ricketts ceased for a while.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLOT THICKENS—BAD NEWS—ELDRED'S TEMPTATION—A TERRIBLE RIDE.

THERE is one defect in a locomotive—we may say two defects, though one is only the effect of the other—it cannot hear, and cannot speak. If *Polyphemus* could speak, what a "moral" could it, like the famous

"Irish Jaunting Car," disclose? But *Polyphemus* was discreet: he never repeated anything about other people, much as he was addicted to "puffing" himself. This may be regarded by some as conceit, but there is really no more modest machine in existence than the locomotive engine. The statement could be maintained by illustrations, but you must accept the fact.

If *Polyphemus* could only have "spoken" in any way other than whistling, and so giving his instructions to the signalmen, he would have done so, and warned his driver. *Polyphemus* knew something of Mr. Ricketts, and a good deal of Amos Killby. The engine had glared at them with its Cyclopean eye: viz., the single lamp hanging at the centre of the smoke-box door, and just over it, and had read their characters plainly in that fierce light which beat upon them. *Polyphemus* would, if he could, have related many conversations held in the shed when the great doors were closed, and when the cleaner was away, or assisting a mate on another engine in the dead of night.

Polyphemus was not an ill-disposed locomotive; but he had his crotchets, like all others of his class. The locomotive is liable to illness, crankiness, accident, loss of power and "grip," even as mankind! Who, then, can say that it is not intelligent? It is—well, almost!

That day *Polyphemus* went back to the yard, and was examined, his fire raked out, and permitted a rest. The engine-driver was afterwards allowed the afternoon off, and met his wife and her friends at the neighbouring Exhibition. They were having tea in the grounds, when once again Eldred recognised Mr. Ricketts, and with him his confidential friend and faithful Achates—the silent person known as "Number

One." They seated themselves at a table near Eldred, who, brushed up and clean, in better trim than usual, did not look much like the driver of *Polyphemus*. He was much impressed by the appearance of these two men, and directed the guard's attention to them, for Solomon (the guard) was a friend of the party.

"Can't understand it, Bob," said he. "You must be mistook."

"Not me," answered Eldred. "I've seen 'em together afore. Never mind; they may be only likenesses!"

"Likenesses! Oh, yes; let's go and be photographed," exclaimed a young lady of the party, who had much attraction for the good-looking guard—his plain uniform, flower in his coat, and well-trimmed hair and beard! He looked a good specimen, and Miss Susan Appleby thought he was a very handsome one.

"I don't want to be taken in these clothes," remonstrated Eldred; "so I'll remain."

"And I'll stay with you, Bob," assented his wife. "Don't be too long, you people."

The party separated. Eldred and his wife stayed and finished the tea.

"Excuse me half a minute, lass. Just want to make an inquiry yonder."

"From those gentlemen, Bob? Never! Who are they?"

"Oh, they're about the line. I just want to ask for someone I know who is laid up."

"Who is it? Did you hear Amos Killby is dying? Why, what's the matter, Bob dear? Are you ill? Here, you man, waiter, what you call yourself! Come here."

"Hush! I tell thee I'm only faint-like. It's the tea, I suppose: too strong, maybe. But who told you about Amos, Molly? I'm all right!"

He did not look all right by any means. He was pale and anxious: all his fears returned with tenfold force. Not having had any news himself, he had tried to put away the question, and the consequences of his impulsive action: but now the blow had fallen!

"Dying! Who said so? Why, we saw him on Tuesday night—you remember?"

"Yes, I remember. Wasn't that the night you came home in that queer state? Oh, Robert! you had been fighting then. Amos Killby had a blow and a fall, young Simmons said. Tell me the truth, dear: did *you* strike him?"

"I did; but I never intended to injure him, that I'll swear."

"And he is dying! Poor Amos! But," she cried, suddenly rousing herself, "what will they do to *you*? Oh, Bob! they will take you up, won't they?"

"Shut up thy mouth, can't 'ee! There's folks listenin.' I'll ask them gentlemen. They were there, I think."

"Them two? Rubbish!" exclaimed Mrs. Eldred. "You're making up a tale now. It's best to tell the whole truth."

"There is nothing to tell. Wait here; I'll just go over and ask them."

So saying, Bob disengaged himself from the table a matter of a minute or so, and made his way, not without trouble, in the direction of the table at which the confederates were seated. But he soon found his front approach barred by a line of chairs, and he was

compelled to go round and get to his destination behind the backs of the gentlemen he wished to address.

This manœuvre occupied some few minutes more, and even then he could not immediately approach Mr. "Jack," as he, in his mind, styled the cynical Ricketts. As he edged up, diffidently enough, considering his general boldness of demeanour, he could not help hearing some scraps of the conversation of the men.

"I tell you," said Mr. Ricketts, "we *must* do it. The specie once 'on board,' all our calculations will fail. We'll smash them up, body and bones."

"And ruin many honest people," murmured the other man, who seemed to have some small scruples.

"Perhaps; but we'll have our revenge first. Then let them recover; and we can slip in again on the rising markets. We shall hold all the power, and can control the shares. It's a big thing."

"An uncommon dangerous thing," said the other.

"Not as matters are at present. The distrust is spreading; the City will be on the verge of a panic. There are too many pieces of paper out, and the bills will not be met. That game killed Huderhinds and Govins. We'll kill the Modkins' bank, and pocket the plunder. Then let the rumour fly that the branch has 'gone,' and the London office will. Well, what do you want?" he cried suddenly, pausing in his speech.

"Beg pardon, but have you heard of Amos Killby, gentlemen?" asked Eldred shyly.

"Oh, it's you: how did *you* come here? Yes; he's dying—or dead! You are right to cut away. No words, my good fellow; you're in a tight place," replied Mr. Ricketts cheerfully. "Best quit!"

"Quit!" gasped Eldred. "He's dead, then?"

Mr. Ricketts made no reply: he was thinking. Could he make use of this engine-driver? But "Number One" replied—

"So they say. We don't wish to hurt you, but keep quiet. Your opponent is as dead as Queen Anne, we hear. Doctors telegraph—'Can't live'!"

Eldred groaned and turned away, forgetting that doctors are not infallible, and often disagree, so that the decisive telegram might have been modified had another opinion been called in. His dejected appearance told his wife his anxiety and fear for the consequences, and she felt sick at heart. All the harshness was forgotten, and she, like a true woman, only remembered the husband she had solemnly promised to love, honour, and obey.

"Well, Bob?" she said.

"It's true: Amos is dyin'—or dead! Here's luck, isn't it? as bad as bad can be!"

Then her worst fears were confirmed, but she endeavoured to comfort him.

"But it *may* not be true. Those gentlemen may not know. How do *you* know them?"

"They were with Amos when I knocked him over: the soft-pated fool! Why must he go and crack his empty head?"

"Then they can witness against you? Oh dear, dear! why *will* you get so passionate?"

"Come, no snivellin', Molly! We must get out o' this scrape. I'd give all I have to clear it off. I don't care what I did! Fancy it! Penal servitude it is."

"Oh, not that, Bob dear. They can't say you killed him if he *is* dead!"

"Can't they? Little the' know'st o' law? Why, they hires a man to prove it all, and pays him as I

never injured, and never saw before, to prove me a guilty man by ingenious and botherin' questions. There's no good in a world where there's lawyers let loose to ballyrag poor people into sayin' the opposite o' what they wants to say, and then they pin them to it! But what'll we do? It's all thy fault, Mary."

"All my fault, Robert? What d'ye mean, lad? My fault ye killed the man? Yer daft mad!"

"Ay, thy fault! If the' hadn't been a-chatterin' so confidential, I'd not a' taken any notice of him. But the' set me thinkin', and so I punched him first chance! What wast sayin'?"

Mary Eldred made no reply for a moment. But the harsh repetition of the question compelled her to answer.

"Why, only about you yourself. I wanted to find out whether Amos had been up to any tricks, and when he stopped me and asked about your turns, I up and told him if he played any games on you I'd give him in charge! 'I know of your playin' at the bridge,' I said, meanin' the fire—not really thinkin' it was him, either."

"Well," inquired Eldred, "what did he say?"

"He got mighty confused, and says he—'Did ye know it? I *was* there; I got the fall there. Did anyone see me that night? It's a mercy I didn't upset the goods.' That was the ghost, Bob!"

"Then the scoundrel *was* there! Oh! but I'm glad I punched him. He hanted me, did he? He'll never do it again. But what's to be done? Thee's clever, lass, and found him out. Say, what's it?"

"Wait until we hear something certain, of course. Don't let us believe all these things we hear second-hand. Come along, Bob; there's no harm done yet."

"I must go back to the station soon, Molly," he

replied dejectedly. "It's all over with me now; we must manage as best we can. Go and find the others: there they are yonder, by the band. Tell Fred I have returned to the shed."

Eldred watched his wife rejoin her friends, and then he turned away to seek the entrance. His way lay through one of the pavilions, and in it he encountered the cynical Mr. Ricketts.

"Still here, driver?" said he. "Dangerous place! Look out, if you value your skin!"

"I ain't afraid," replied Eldred boldly. "I done no harm o' purpose, sir!"

"No; but if you saw your way you would get out of it! There are only two witnesses—I and my friend. Now, perhaps, if you helped us in a small way we would help *you*. I see you're in a hurry."

"Not over and above a hurry," replied Eldred. "I've got to look at the engine yonder, up in the shed."

"Well, some day we shall see you. Meanwhile, keep quiet. Say nothing, and don't know anything about Killby. He's out of the way, and my friend and myself will serve you in this way if you will do a small service for us. Is it a bargain?"

"It's a bargain, sir: though, goodness knows, I never intended to hurt Amos severe. What can I do for it?"

"You will learn when the time comes. We will save your neck for your own sake, and for your wife's sake—a pretty young woman she is. Your name is Eldred, I believe?"

"Yes, that's my name."

"And you drive the excursion train—and perhaps a special, eh?"

"Ay, like enough. Well, sir?"

"Will you give a friend of mine a ride one night? Come, now, it isn't much; he won't be in your way."

"Oh, he won't be in my way; but it's agen the rules to have a stranger on the ingin without a pass."

"But if I get a pass——"

"Then he's welcome any time: he can come any day or night if he wants to. There's a fine, you see, if we let strangers up."

"How much is the fine?" asked Ricketts.

"A pound if he's discovered."

"And if he is not discovered?"

"Then there's no harm done, sir," replied the driver, laughing gently.

"Well, here's half-a-sovereign. You will give my friend a ride some night, and he will hand you a sovereign; so that if you are fined you can pay it; and if you are not you can keep it. That's fair!"

"An' handsome," replied Eldred, pocketing the coin. "You'll excuse me, sir; I must be going."

So saying, he touched his cap and turned away.

A careless "Good-night, Eldred," from Ricketts accompanied him.

"Ten shillings," murmured the driver, "and some more to come! Molly will be pleased to get it, for the money don't last very long, either. It's a bit of a risk, but it's paid for and a bit of luck, and no one has ever run on my ingins yet. It'll be all right."

So Eldred consoled himself, and did his work in the shed. *Polyphemus* had to return at ten o'clock, so his driver inspected him and backed him down at the proper time. Eldred said nothing to his wife before the others, but when he returned home early in the morning, after putting away the locomotive, he told her of his good luck.

She demurred, however. "You oughtn't to do it, Bob ; some day you'll be found out."

"Some day, thou silly ! Why, it's only for once."

"It's once too often, Robert. You'll have a black mark against you."

"Not for once. And then think: if that soft-headed Amos *is* dead we'll get out of it all."

"But why does this gentleman want to ride on your engine ?" asked the suspicious Molly.

"He doesn't; a friend does. There's the ten shillin's, and next time it will be a sovereign. I'm goin' to bed after I've had a wash up !"

Eldred quitted the room, and made his way to the "back kitchen," where he indulged in a thorough ablution, and came back as ruddy as he had before been black. A bit of supper was then set before him, and he soon after retired.

Two days passed, and no news was heard of Amos. He had been removed to a hospital, some said, by a gentleman's orders, and was dying. Then the week came to an end ; the Eldreds quitted their cottage, and came up to live in part of a small house in the south-east of London, near the locomotive depôt, and actually within sight of the line.

The driver of *Polyphemus* breathed more freely. He was out of the way. If Amos did not survive, he fancied himself safe, and when two or three days elapsed, and no application was made to him to give anyone a ride on his engine, he began to think that Mr. Ricketts had taken a fancy to him, and had "tipped" him out of sheer good nature.

But this sense of security did not last long.

Eldred and his wife were getting comfortable in their new lodgings. The other occupants of the house were a ticket-collector, his wife, and child. The

collector had married and settled upon the munificent salary of twenty shillings a week, with few holidays, and many hours' attendance each working day. He had an occasional Sunday "off," and scorning idleness, he on those days expounded religious subjects to an admiring audience.

With this man and his small family the Eldreds became friendly. Mrs. Eldred, in particular, was glad to have a married woman as her companion, and she (Molly) being an excellent manager, gave Mrs. Bathwick, the ticket-collector's wife, some useful information in housekeeping. In such pleasant companionship the days passed. Eldred drove his engine daily, and felt secure.

One tempestuous afternoon he was booked for the four-thirty express out. He had to run past Wexthorpe, and then take the branch line to Bullden, a fashionable place during the autumn. For autumn had come: the trees were already putting on the brown and ruddy tints which glorify the dying leaves, and give the beholder some promise of a golden future as the year of his life shall fade away.

But on the occasion in question the night promised to be stormy. The wind was already increasing in force, and blowing sideways to the track—a direction no engine-man likes, as it interferes with his engine fire, makes steaming more difficult, and progress slower. Eldred and his mate arrived at Wexthorpe, his former locality, in safety, and got down to oil the machinery while the train halted.

The driver had finished his side, and taking a spanner, he tested a few of the nuts and screws. While thus occupied the signal dropped, and he returned to the step of the engine, calling to his mate,

who replied from the other side as he went back to the platform.

The night was very dark, and beyond the gleam of the furnace, and the head-lights of the engine, and the platform lamps, the gloom settled down heavily. Eldred had been very quiet all the run that evening, for the engine required considerable attention. He ascended to the foot-plate, and saw that all was right there, but as he leaned over to look for his fireman, the guard waved his lamp, and the driver whistled to warn his mate.

Eldred was always extremely careful to whistle under these circumstances, unless his young fireman was with him on the foot-plate, for many a man has been fatally injured by the neglect of fireman or driver to whistle when the other is employed in inspecting or oiling the engine. Then, after a short pause, he started, and *Polyphemus* began the intermediate stage of his journey. The locomotive was getting into its stride, struggling against the wind, which beat down the steam upon the foot-plate, or sent it swirling away in heavy masses to leeward; but not until he had gained some speed did Eldred perceive that he was alone on the engine.

Where was his fireman? Bob looked along the framing on each side, and endeavoured to make out whether his mate was in front or on the tender. He whistled gently to attract his attention, and not hearing any reply, he quitted the foot-plate, after reducing the speed a little, to investigate the matter.

Clinging to the hand-rail, Eldred passed on over the great throbbing wheels and along the front of the engine. Here the wind was very high; the speed of the train meeting the rushing "south-wester" made the bogie-truck a dangerous perch; the head-light

almost dazed him, and beyond its gleam a rushing and racing landscape, dark hedges, and swishing branches, spectre telegraph poles and swaying grasses on the sloping embankment.

The fireman was not on the engine. Where had he gone? Why had he quitted his post? He had been left behind: that was certain, unless—and the idea made Eldred's heart stop beating—unless he had run over him and killed him! Perhaps at that very moment the poor lad's head, or his limbs, were in the ash-pan!

A terrible suspicion! As it crossed his mind, Eldred almost fell from the frame-plate, but he managed to regain his post again in safety.

CHAPTER X.

THE "PHANTOM" OF AMOS KILLBY—THE FIGHT
ON THE FOOT-PLATE—A HANDSOME RECOG-
NITION—AN ILL-TEMPERED "PILOT."

NEVER was engine-driver in such a quandary as Eldred on that occasion. On such a night the engine required every attention from fireman and driver. A good look-out was necessary, and firing was continually required. The driver took in the situation at once; he did not dare to put back. He must do the trip, and get a lad at the junction from the shunting engine to help him.

So, both eyes and ears on the alert, watching the road, the signals, the gauges, and the fire, our driver had enough to do. The wind roared and the fire blew about; the brave engine breasted the storm, and

Eldred listened in the darkness for the well-known roar or rattle of bridge, or wall, or coping, which would tell him exactly where he was. He knew every foot of the line, and could *almost* have run the trip blindfold.

As the level run was approached, Bob fancied that he heard a noise behind him on the tender. A lump of coal had perhaps moved, but the movement was accompanied by a sound like a sigh or a breath, as if someone were endeavouring to move quietly, and without any noise of breathing.

This mysterious sound nearly made Eldred's blood run cold. He knew that his engine was considered "unlucky": that no other man cared particularly to drive it; and here again came a mysterious ghostly noise, plainly audible even amidst the rushing wind and hissing, whirling steam! All his superstitious fancies crowded round the unfortunate engine-driver. He was almost afraid to turn round, and excused himself for so doing by his attention to the signals.

But he knew he must in time turn and fire the engine. Meantime, the "ghost," or whatever it was, would perhaps leave him. But the noise increased, and then with an effort Eldred threw open the furnace door, and turned to face the suspected danger.

His heated blood literally ran cold: he felt a terrible creeping chill pervading his veins, which seemed to tingle in his body. He turned deadly pale as he stood half in shadow, half in the glare of the furnace, which threw its ruddy glow upon the steam overhead, and upon the fast-flying hedges, and racing trees and fences.

A horrible chill paralysed him for a moment.

Crouching on the tender, in the full glare of the fire, was the form of Amos Killby—a long knife in his hand, and a grin of deadly purpose in his hard-set face. There was no mirth in that grin: the lips, compressed so tightly, had elongated the mouth into the grim semblance of a grin, which could have been only successfully imitated by a skeleton or a mummy.

Eldred stood speechless, staring at the apparition, as he deemed it, and quite unable to move. He had no doubt for the moment but that Amos had come to haunt him, but when the "ghost" moved, and the fire gleamed on the long blade of the knife, Eldred's manhood returned to him. He grasped the shovel with which he had been about to put on the coals, and awaited the threatened attack.

All this while *Polyphemus* was rushing on, with his train full of unconscious passengers behind him, without guidance or assistance, leaping, jolting over the rails into the unknown darkness beyond, trusting to the platelayer and the ganger. We little imagine the risks we run in our night journeys, when we can see nothing to warn us of the loose rail, the broken chair, the washed-out sleeper, the straying animal, or the fallen obstruction on the track!

On went *Polyphemus*, bounding into the roaring darkness, with two men glowering at each other in the gleam of the furnace fire!

"Amos," gasped Eldred at length, "is't thou?"

"Yes, Amos," replied the other—"himself!"

"You're not dead, Amos?" asked the engine-driver, who was beginning to recover himself in the presence of only a human being. A "ghost" was a very different thing to tackle!

"No, I'm not dead, though you did your best to

kill me. It's my turn now, so look out. You'll never reach your journey's end alive!"

Eldred was horrified. Was the man mad or inflamed with drink? His wild eyes and haggard features, ragged hair, and terribly emaciated but very muscular form, told a tale of sickness and suffering. On the other hand, the knife, the air of stern resolve, and the vengeful glare of the sunken wild eyes told of determined wrath, even of madness!

It was a fearful situation, and Eldred stood almost motionless, afraid to turn round, and yet conscious that seconds were rapidly running away, and that an accident might happen unless he could control his engine.

Meanwhile, Amos was creeping closer and closer by almost imperceptible degrees, and getting the engine-driver within reach of his terrible knife, which he held advanced to receive any sudden onslaught.

But Eldred had by this time "pulled himself together," and was determined not to give in if the struggle did come. His greatest anxiety was concerning the train. He knew that in fifteen minutes he must pull up at the junction, and by that time his conflict with this wild, revengeful Amos must be decided one way or the other. As his opponent kept sliding down towards him silently, evidently waiting for an opportunity to spring upon him, Eldred perceived that he must take the initiative, or be worsted in the encounter if it came to close quarters.

He made no sign until Amos, with all his caution, slipped on the very edge of the tender. It was only the unanticipated movement of a second's duration,



THE STRUGGLE IN THE CAB (*see p. 107*).

somewhat, but only slightly, favourable, kept the speed up, and the struggle continued.

Eldred hoped now to reach the regulator and shut off the steam, or, at any rate, to open the brake whistle and give the alarm to the guard, who, in his box, surrounded by sweeping clouds of steam, and half deafened by the jarring of his brake, neither saw nor heard anything unusual, though he remarked that the door of the furnace was kept open longer than ordinary.

The combatants, panting, heaving, and swaying, were striving fiercely. Eldred for one moment freed his right hand, and succeeded in planting a severe blow on his opponent's neck ; but at the same time he slipped on the plate on which he was struggling, and almost fell. His foot came in contact with the fire-door, and shut it with a clang. The train rushed on. Amos closed with the driver, and made a most desperate attempt to stab him.

The blow, had it taken effect, would have ended the driver's term of service pretty quickly ; but *Polyphemus*, with superior intelligence, just managed at that moment to sway upon an ill-fitting switch that, at the pace at which the engine was travelling, bumped it considerably. This jump saved the driver ! Amos staggered, and nearly fell ; Eldred caught the fellow's neck, and bent him down to the foot-plate in the darkness ; while with his left hand he felt for the regulator handle.

As Amos still struggled and tried to use his knife, Eldred saw that no half measures would do. Already the red lights were growing brighter, and reflecting on the polished rails. The beat of the engine never slackened, and danger to the whole train was imminent, when Eldred suddenly released his opponent,

seized a lump of coal from the tender, and as Amos rose to continue the mad fight, dashed the black mass in his face.

The man staggered and fell against the boiler, slipping down, half insensible for the moment, getting slowly burned in contact with the hot brass of the gauges. Seizing the opportunity, Eldred shut off steam, took the knife from the relaxed grasp of Amos Killby, and leaned against the tender to recover himself; and then, after a momentary pause, whistled the brakes "on" sharply in a few quick calls, which speedily had effect.

Amos lay half reclining against the boiler, and then Eldred, fearing an accident, flung some lumps into the furnace and put on the "feed." Then he turned his attention to his late opponent, who was by that time recovering.

The guard, who looked out immediately he heard the whistling for brakes, came out of his van the moment *Polyphemus* pulled up, and inquired what was the matter. Eldred pointed to the intruder.

"Where's your mate, then?" asked the guard. "Why, this is Amos Killby, isn't it?" he exclaimed, as he turned his lamp upon the fellow's face.

"Ay," replied Eldred. "Take him into your van, or remain here until we pull up again in the station."

"I'll fetch a piece of cord," said the guard; "we'll make sure of him."

So saying, he hurried to his van; but no sooner had he departed than Amos leaped suddenly to his feet, struck Eldred a blow which staggered him, and dropped off the engine. By the time the guard had returned and Eldred had recovered his presence of

mind the assailant had disappeared in the darkness of the line.

"He's bolted!" cried Eldred. "Let him go. He's left his knife; and when we meet again, it will go hard with Master Amos!"

While these exchanges had been proceeding on the *Polyphemus* the passengers had been wondering at the sudden stoppage, and the guard from the rear of the train arrived just in time to see a spectral-looking figure disappear across the metals into the hedge opposite. Many heads were protruded from the carriage windows, and questions poured in from excited or curious passengers.

"Where's your mate, Bob?" asked the rear guard. "He's bolted, hasn't he?"

"Left him at Wexthorpe—and that fellow, Amos Killby, nearly did for me. He's a lunatic, I suppose. But jump on, mates; we must be gettin' on."

As soon as the junction was reached the station-master was duly informed, briefly, of the cause of the detention, the struggle on the foot-plate, and of the absence of the fireman. Some slight extra delay was caused by this, and the necessity for finding an assistant. Meantime, the passengers discussed the details of the encounter which one of the guards had embellished, and for his (own reported) bravery had received half-a-crown.

This generosity on the part of a well-to-do passenger started the ball of subscription for Eldred. A young gentleman went along the line, hat in hand, and requested a small subscription for the engine-driver, who, by his determination and pluck, had saved the train from destruction. From compartment to compartment the young fellow passed, waiting

until all had subscribed ; and then he came to Eldred with his hat full of coins.

"Here you are, driver!—the passengers think you're a Trojan, and have subscribed something. My governor shall hear of it, you may depend."

"I'm sure it's handsome, sir; and I don't half like takin' so much: there's a lot o' money in the hat!"

"All the better for you, man. Come, let me pour the stuff into your pocket—or stay; ladle it out yourself. You're a splendid driver: what's your name?"

"Robert Eldred, sir."

"Very good. Well, Eldred, I will let your bravery be known. My father is Mr. Cannon, the loco' superintendent, you know; and I'll take care that he doesn't forget you.—Oh, very well, station-master; time's up, is it? Look out, Eldred. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir. Very much obliged, sir. Will you thank the passengers?"

Young Cannon only waved his hand in reply and re-entered the train, which reached its destination without any further adventure some twenty minutes late, and considerable excitement was aroused in consequence. As the passengers streamed out, pushing through the expectant crowd of friends and relatives, Eldred from his engine thanked those who quitted the train, and the cause of the detention was quickly promulgated.

Public curiosity rose to a high pitch immediately. Dozens of people pressed upon *Polyphemus*, who hissed and fumed at being subjected to so much inspection and popular observation. Eldred, pestered with questions, was only too glad to back his engine out with the train, and make ready for his return journey with the mail.

When he reached the hut he found it empty—but this was all the better. He then emptied his pockets upon the rough table in the “cabin,” and proceeded to count his gains. What had the passengers subscribed? Five pounds! Five pounds in silver was his reward for saving two hundred and fifty men, women, and children of all grades, and the property of the company! But Eldred was satisfied. He thought no more of his own danger and of the tremendous struggle upon the engine when his life hung in the balance!

In fact, he felt considerably relieved in his mind when he thought that Amos was not dead, and that he himself could now feel secure. The “ghost” of his enemy was a myth, and though many curious adventures had undoubtedly succeeded the appearance of the man with the ensanguined hand, our driver knew enough to associate human agency with those appearances.

Amos, who had determined on his revenge, had thus for the third time attempted his life! Such animosity was not understood by Robert Eldred. His temper was quick, and his blows followed it; but such persistent malice was extraordinary. Amos had been “bested” by Eldred, and he would never forgive him the loss of Mary Evans.

“Hollo, uncle! Got a power o’ brass there!” exclaimed a pilot-man, as he entered the hut at that juncture, and discovered Bob Eldred counting his well-gotten gains. “Where’s ye picked up that lot?”

“From the passengers at the junction,” replied Eldred, quietly transferring the coins from the table to his pocket. “There was a shindy on th’ ingen, and I managed to put things straight.”

“And where was your mate all the time?” asked

the pilot-man suspiciously, with a greedy look in his eyes.

"He had dropped off sudden. Young Mister Cannon—he got up the collection for me."

"How much is it, mate?"

"Five pounds, or thereabouts, Joe. It will just please my missus."

"Ye couldn't spare a few shillin's, I s'pose, for a pal, could ye now? I'm desp'rit hard up, Bob; it's true, I swear! A few bob wouldn't hurt ye."

"No; I don't suppose they would. Money never hurt me yet," replied Eldred. "What dost the' want the money for?"

"For special purposes. Just a few shillin's; make it ten bob."

"I'll give the' half-a-crown, but no more," said Eldred. "'Twill be only drunk away if I do."

"I won't have less than ten, I tell ye," retorted "Sulky Joe," as he was generally called. "It's ten or nothing, my fine shaver!"

"Then it's nothin'!" retorted Eldred firmly. "Thou'lt do no good with it if the' had it."

"But I can do mischief without it," muttered the Sulky One. "You *won't* give me the ten?"

"No; that I won't," said Bob Eldred. "Thou'rt a bit 'on' now, I b'lieve. Keep quiet. Take my advice. Wait till another time, lad. Art on a turn to-night?"

"Ay," replied the pilot-man, with a queer look in his eyes. "I'm pilotin' the mail up this evenin' as far as Wexthorpe. Good-night; I'm goin' t' have a glass o' ale. Ye won't lend me the ten shillin's?"

"Not a rap. Thou'rt too far 'on' a'ready. Take my advice—keep steady, man."

Sulky Joe's reply need not be chronicled; so the

precise destination of Eldred's advice and good intentions will never be accurately known.

"Well, well, he must lie on the bed he is makin'," was the driver's comment; "but I'm sorry he's my pilot to-night. It's time I looked up *Polyphemus*."

CHAPTER XI.

RUNNING PILOT—IN A SIGNAL-BOX—A BAD LEAD AND A FIERY "LAGGING."

POLYPHEMUS was a model engine, and perfectly well-behaved in the shed. Some engines, as engine-men will tell you, are ready to develop various weaknesses or faults at unexpected and inconvenient moments. They get loosened, or heated, or their tires get cracked—just out of sheer "cussedness," as the Americans phrase it.

But *Polyphemus* was as amenable in the hands of a trusty lad as in those of his master. You never saw *Polyphemus* with leaking tubes, wasting steam; he never slipped at starting; his sand ran out dry and clean, and prevented any failure. That stormy night the lad, who had temporarily come on, had had no trouble with *Polyphemus*. "She" was as quiet as ever, and submitted to the boy's governing as quietly as if Eldred himself were present.

Eldred, as we have often had occasion to remark, was not a driver to leave anything to "chance." He continually examined his engine, and so the "boy fireman" had little or no responsibility that night. The ash-pan was clear, the smoke-box door tight. Eldred came and oiled the machine himself.

The engine had been turned on the circular table and was ready to proceed in the proper manner—chimney first. A tender engine never ought to be run at speed tender first; there is then a risk of the tender jumping the road and causing an accident. So Eldred always had his *Polyphemus* turned round to run under normal conditions.

The pilot engine had to go out first, of course, and get out of the way to permit Eldred to hook on to the train. Then the "pilot" would hook on to him, and assist him. Engine-men do not generally care about a pilot—they prefer to run their train alone, if they can—and Eldred was one of these independent men. He had set his lad to clean out the tubes, and a mass of granulated coal, "slaggy" dust, had been discharged from the smoke-box door in the shed. The steam would now keep up a good blast, and if the exigencies of the traffic had not demanded the presence of the pilot engine at Wexthorpe that night for an excursion train, Eldred might have carried the mail unassisted. But the orders were to pilot the mail instead of running "light," and on such a windy night the order should not have been unwelcome.

There were no notices to be attended to; the line was clear and in good repair. The engine was in proper trim, and the steam at good pressure. There was nothing for the driver to do just then. The down train was late, and he could not leave until it had arrived, as only a single line then existed between the junction and that terminus. This line was worked on the "staff" system, by which the engine-man, who carries the bâton, only has the right to proceed. Therefore, till Eldred received the "staff" from the station-master, he could not start with the mail.

It was blowing hard when Eldred stepped across the metals to ask the signalman in his box whether the down train was on the road. The wind sang and whistled through the wires like a dismal Æolian harp high overhead. The driver entered the signal-box, and with some difficulty closed the door.

"Rough night, Tom," he said, nodding at the man.

"Ay, 'tis so ; trains late too," replied Tom.

"Not signalled yet ?" asked Eldred.

"No ; unless the wire's down ; but in that case I'd ha' heard the bell go."

"Well, Tom," said Eldred cheerfully, "the's quite a Jack-in-the-box up here. I wouldn't be on thy job for a trifle. Why, look at all them new levers ! What's them for ?"

"The new sidin's. Ay, there's a tidy few points about here ; it looks complicated a bit, but it's easy enough. Ye can't make a mistake !"

"Can't, eh ? Looks to me as if there'd be nowt else with all them levers ! I never could rightly understand 'em, Tom."

The signalman briefly explained the ingenious mechanism to the driver ; and as, no doubt, many readers of this volume would also like to know the mode of working the signals, I will explain it in a few sentences.

The signals moved are many and at various distances, and one would naturally inquire how the levers for all the points are worked. The handles are numbered with serial numbers attached to those which must be also pulled to let the train cross from line to line. Some levers are coloured red, others green, according to the points or signals they control.

There are many levers, and at first, and even after a long time, it seems to the visitor impossible that any men can remain in full possession of all their faculties in a signal-box of any importance. The continued ringing of electric bells and clanging of levers ; the almost endless labour of some days, the necessity of replying at once to the beats which vary greatly in number, and the demand for immediate perfect attention and clear-headedness, seem to be requirements almost superhuman.

A lever is labelled with three or four numbers, perhaps ; this numbering indicates the stamps on the other levers, which must be pulled off with the first one. Suppose we have 23, 5, 6, 9, on a lever which is No. 23. Then you must pull off all the other numbers to clear the road required. When the train is gone the numbers are let go in reverse order ; the line is closed then, the points fixed. All is in normal condition ; and this state could not be arrived at if anything was wrong, or any signal wrongly shown. The point levers interlock with the signal levers, and none can be moved without the others to complete the operation.

Perhaps half a dozen or more movements may thus be necessary before the train can cross the lines. Point tracks must be blocked, others opened, signals lowered and raised, before a train can find its way clear across the metals to a siding or other line.

In the signal-box are small (miniature) signal-posts about six inches high. These reproduce, *in the box*, the actions of the signals hundreds of yards away on the line ; so a man can see at a glance whether his signals are acting properly. The danger-signal at one station-box is also controlled by the signaller in the *next* one, and thus he indicates danger by a

"detective," which *the man in whose box it is cannot alter*. It is worked from the next "block" cabin, and shows the state of the signal there.

Four bell inquiries are necessary for every train. Train "on" is the warning, then the recipient of it signals to next box; he receives the reply "Line clear," which he sends back with a "ring," and takes off his danger-signal. This has to be done dozens of times in an hour, and on busy days the ringing is incessant and confusing to an ordinary mind; while the hard labour involved would alarm many a convict or navvy.

Eldred was of this opinion also.

"Ting, ting," on the electric bell announced the approach of the passenger train, and Eldred prepared to descend.

"Good-night, Tom; take care of yourself up here. Don't get blown away!"

"Never fear; I'm fast enough. Mind your run in this wind. Take an old man's advice: see your ashpan's clear, and don't let your fire burn black or smoke."

"Never mind; thanks, all the same. I've a pilot, and we can't go to glory altogether. Good-night."

So they parted. Eldred repaired to the shed, and as soon as the pilot-men had run out ahead he followed, and immediately crossed the points to the train. The pilot engine followed, and hooked on to *Polyphemus*.

Both the men were on the foot-plate of the foremost engine, but neither of them took any notice of Eldred or his fireman. The pilot was "blowing off" already, and making a greater noise every moment, until at length the roaring of the escaping steam became almost deafening. The driver of *Polyphemus*

was anxious to be off, and had not long to wait. The signal was given, and the engines started together.

The pilot pulled off with a jerk, which with a dead load would have torn away the draw-bar or broken the couplings. However, no harm was done, but the careless way of starting made Eldred very cautious.

"Mind Joe, mate ; he's not in first-rate fettle to-night, and may play us a trick, by accident ! If the' sees aught, let me know."

Nothing happened while the single line was being traversed ; the train pulled up at the junction, and the driver of *Polyphemus*, after walking round her, went up, wiping his hands, to speak to the pilot-men. Both were absent from the foot-plate, nor could Eldred see them around the engine. He turned back, cleaning his hands thoughtfully on the lump of waste, wiping each finger carefully, when the men appeared from a small public-house beside the line.

"Time's up !" shouted Eldred. "Ye should attend to your engine ; yer ash-pan is nigh choked up."

"Mind your own business," retorted "Sulky Joe." "Keep your own ingin out of mischief. Got all your money, I hope. Don't you lose it, nor give a pal a few halfpence, mind. Don't !"

This speech indicated the animosity which still lingered in the breast of the Sulky One, who had again been indulging in a "glass o' ale" or spirits—a most reprehensible practice when with an important train ; though *some* men can run better under such circumstances, being more "comfortable," and more apt to keep time.

But as the pilot-men appeared pretty lively, Eldred made no remark. He trusted to habit and practice to pull them through all right.

The train started. It was rather heavy, and there

was the bank to pull up. The weather was rough and wet: heavy showers came rushing across, and quickly cleared off again; but the darkness was a constant quantity. The pilot on these occasions has all the responsibility of the look-out, so Eldred and his mate were not quite so observant as usual; but still they kept their eyes and ears open, and were by no means dull or inattentive.

Several miles had been traversed in silence. The signals were clear as far as could be seen, and no stop was anticipated for an hour or more. The pilot engine pumped along, and the train had proceeded some fifteen miles at a good pace, when Eldred's young fireman said—

“Don't you smell something burning?”

“There *is* a queer smell about somewhere,” replied Eldred, in the same loud tone necessary on an engine when running. “Nowt here, is it?”

“No; it's very faint-like. Comes in around us. Don't you smell it?”

“Ay; just look out while I go along the framin'. The ingin's burnin', I think.”

Eldred stepped out, and, clinging to the hand-rail, passed along over the throbbing cranks and slide-bars to the bogie-truck in front. Here was plenty of space to stand, and as he gripped the rail outside the smoke-box, the smell of something burning struck upon his senses more forcibly.

He was very much puzzled. There was no sign of fire in the air. The engines were working steadily; the pilot was running quietly; but it struck Eldred that “she” was not pulling much—that, in fact, *Polyphemus* was doing the giant's share of the work. So our driver looked at the front couplings, and perceived that they were slackened, and thus at once

understood that *Polyphemus* was actually drawing the mail, and pushing the pilot along also to some extent. She was just holding her own ; no more.

"Lazy brute!" muttered Eldred, apostrophising the Sulky One. "I wish I had thee and thy mate within reach of a pricker! Can't see thee, neither of ye. I'll wake 'em up, though!"

Muttering to himself, and, as he might have declared, somewhat "obfuscated" by the smell of burning or smouldering, the violent wind, and dashing rain, Eldred made his way back to his own footplate, and opened the whistle. The shrill blast pierced the rushing storm, and was carried down the wind for a long distance, literally

" ' Whistled down the wind,' as Shakespeare says,
In one or other of his mad-cap plays."

But to no purpose. The engine-men upon the pilot remained inattentive to Eldred's summons.

"Hang me if I can understand it, lad! Keep a good look-out; mind the fire a minute—I'm goin' forward to the pilot. There's summat wrong there. Playin' tricks, I do b'lieve, for spite. Don't the' know the road?"

"Ay; enough to run for a few mile, anyway," replied the lad, with a grin. "I didn't start a-frin' yesterday!"

"All the better for the', then. Stand up to't; and if the's puzzled any, touch whistle."

Once again Eldred essayed his perilous journey. *Polyphemus*, docile as a well-trained horse, steadied himself, and made no unseemly rolls or lurches as his master clambered on to the bogie-truck plate, and thence essayed to reach the tender of the pilot.

This, as can readily be imagined, was no easy

task. In the first place, the passage itself was full of difficulty at the pace the locomotives were proceeding, now somewhat down-hill, so that the pilot hung a little away from *Polyphemus*. Again, the unequal motion, the lifting and swaying of the engines, the fierce blast caused by the headlong rush against a strong and, at times, tempestuous side wind, were all factors in the sum of Eldred's difficulties.

Another, and perhaps more important, obstacle was the driver's physical condition. His mind had been harassed and his frame severely exercised that afternoon: the tussle on the foot-plate had been severe, if short, and he was beginning to feel his muscles a bit. Nevertheless, he braced himself for the effort; he did not want to stop until he saw reason for it.

All these arguments did not then occur to Eldred, whose action was more rapid than the description of his position, of which he hardly thought a second time. So he essayed the passage.

There was not much space to traverse: the buffers almost touched each other, and round the rear of the tender was a rod, by which he could sustain his footing if he once gained it. The head-lamp showed him sufficient light, and also displayed the very small ledge on which he must safely and surely alight if he wished to succeed in discovering the mischief.

He had his suspicions—grave suspicions—concerning the cause of the burning, but he did not dare to stop the mail until he had done all in his power to check the inroad of the danger.

"It's but a step," he muttered; "but an awkward step. Here goes!"

With trained foot, and hand, and eye working all

together, Eldred strode from the iron plate to the precarious ledge in front of it, at the stern of the tender. He grasped the rod: he was safe! The coal was high above him, and he passed on in safety to the foot-plate of the pilot engine, where the smell of burning was even more disagreeable and intense.

A curious sight met his gaze. In the sheen afforded by the closed grate and by the gauge-lamp, Eldred perceived his pilot engine-men both asleep, each in a corner: one, the driver, standing upright, his arms folded across his chest, his head bent down, fast asleep! The fireman had apparently slid down to the foot-plate when he fell into the arms of Somnus, who had laid him, legs extended, on the plate, propped up by the side-plates—the inside wheel-coverings; the crank beating a lullaby behind him as the trailing driving-wheel, coupled, revolved in unison with its opposite neighbour, on their respective rounds.*

This was surprising enough; but a still greater surprise was in store for him when, on going forward on the frame-plate, he found that the wooden lining, or "lagging," of the boiler was smouldering underneath.

Here was a most remarkable occurrence, the cause of which was soon ascertained. It was not the cause, but the effect, which just then exercised Eldred; and his first action was to administer a few sound kicks to the somnolent engine-men. They awoke, very much disgusted with this treatment, and inclined to resent it. But a few words from Eldred

* The unsophisticated reader must understand that when one crank is near the top, the other is near the bottom centre, so the "play" of the machinery is even and continuous, the full force of the steam being alternately exercised on each side.

quickly calmed the rising anger of the sleepers, and even "Sulky Joe" was silent under the circumstances.

"Get the water, and put out your fire, thou silly!" shouted Eldred, shaking the fireman. "A pretty pickle the'll be in! Hurry up, I tell the'."

"Sulky Joe" had aroused himself, and was at work. The fire wanted attention, steam was low. The pilot was only doing a half share of work, and wanted feeding badly. In fact, all the elements for a bad accident were present, and it would have happened if Eldred and his mate had not had their wits about them.

Joe and his fireman, once aroused to the immediate danger, strove hard to repair the damage and extinguish the fire. They to a great extent succeeded before the train reached the next stopping station, where the condition of the engine attracted some attention from the officials. Inquiry was made, and it resulted in Joe being reduced again to firing until such time as he could learn to drive even as a "relief" man with caution and prudence. His mate was also put back.

Polyphemus drew the mail to Wexthorpe, where Eldred's fireman again turned up with a cart-full of excuses and lamentations. He had only gone over the platform for a moment when he saw the train quitting the station.

"The truth is, mate, the' went'st to jabber with thy sweetheart yonder; that's what was the matter—and now the'll find the wedding postponed!"

No further adventure occurred to *Polyphemus* on the road to town. He did his work as he always did, and arrived true to time, having left the unfortunate pilot at Wexthorpe. In extenuation, it must be stated *that* "relief men," as spare engine-men are called,

have sometimes not much chance. They may be, and often are, called upon to take on perhaps three different engines from men whose "turns" are over, and they have no time, nor perhaps the means, to repair any defects. They must run the engine as she is. She is not their engine: they have no engine of their own, and cannot be expected to take much pride in the machines.

Nevertheless, Joe's mishap was caused by sheer carelessness. The cinders or hot ashes had been thrown up into the underneath—perhaps worn-out—portion of the boiler, and the wood lining had caught fire. If the pan had not been so full of ashes, in all probability this "accident" would not have happened, for the full ash-pan points to carelessness and want of supervision.

So Mr. Joseph had a full opportunity to learn his profession in the pleasant monotony of firing on local passenger trains for several months, while Eldred continued his upward career. On that night, on his return to the shed, he signed off, looked at the list, saw at what hour he was "booked on" next day, and then leaving *Polyphemus* to the cleaners, wended his way home to bed.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. AND MRS. ELDRED AT HOME—AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR GETS A WARM RECEPTION—A NEIGHBOURLY GOSSIP—BAINS' SAD CASE.

SEVERAL days elapsed without anything occurring to break the monotony of the driver's daily routine. He came and went, and took his duty as it came ; paid great attention to *Polyphemus*, which he was beginning to regard with considerable affection, notwithstanding the apparently unlucky character of the engine ; and he also passed some few uncertain hours daily with his wife.

She expressed considerable apprehension concerning Amos, and every time her burly husband quitted the house she felt anxious.

"Bob dear, do be careful—for my sake!"

"For thy sake! Ay, lass; and for my own, and the passengers' too, depend on't! Rest the' safe! I'll not injure the', nor myself neither."

"But you are always in some scrape, Bob."

"Scrape, Molly! what dost call scrape? I've had a bit of a tussle maybe, and five silver pounds for it: paid plaister it did; and the cradle, and——"

"Hush, Bob dear!" she exclaimed, stopping his too forward anticipations; "leave cradles alone. Listen. Mr. Ricketts (is it Ricketts?) called here to-day when you were out—down at Wexthorpe."

"What did he want, then?" asked Eldred, lazily reclining in an arm-chair, and smoking a cigar which

a gentleman—an admirer of the locomotive—had bestowed on the driver.

"He wanted you ; he said you promised to give his friend a ride."

"Ay, did I?—if it can be managed, I said."

"Well, he wants it managed—next Friday—at night, he says."

"Night. Perhaps that's best : it's darker ; but why don't he get a pass ? He's a gentleman as could, I daresay."

"Didn't ask him," responded Molly. "Oh, Bob ! what a dreadful smoke you are making with that cigar ! It's lucky we've no rep curtains to hold it !"

"It's rather a messy one, I must say," he replied. "Suppose I finish him outside—and the'll come maybe later ; eh ?"

"In a minute. Bring out two chairs, Bob dear." So the driver and his wife sat side by side, *tête-à-tête*, in the small green-yard, planted with London pride, and gay in mignonette, which the people of the house called a garden. Its principal features were a post ; two holdfasts in the opposite walls, which were tipped with parti-coloured glass, skilfully evaded by roaming cats ; a long line for drying purposes ; an immense leaky water-butt with a cover, and streaked with green damp.

A few shrubs and some splendid scarlet-runners completed the botanical specimens, which received as much attention as those at Kew, and were more highly appreciated.

As husband and wife sat side by side, they saw the trains rushing by, and sundry comments were made on the traffic. Many a salute of uplifted arms was given by the running men to their resting

comrade, and he returned the courtesy, or waved his cap to the cheerful whistler who touched the handle to call his prompt attention. Time passed, the night came on—autumnal darkness—early, and the driver and his wife thought it advisable to go indoors to supper.

"A gentleman wants Mr. Eldred," screamed a shrill voice from the passage. "He's waitin' in the 'all!"

The "'all" in question was about four feet in length and three feet wide—a space which had got lost when the house was built, and which never found its way beyond the staircase, which was most intrusive in its advances.

"I'm a-comin', Sally; don't bawl so loud. Shut it!"

Sally complied, and "shut it" as directed. Eldred passed his wife, who hung back a little, and in "the 'all" found Mr. Ricketts, in country suit and "pot-hat," not a costume becoming to him.

"Won't the' step within here?" said Eldred, indicating his small sitting-room, parlour, smoking-room, and library—all in one.

"Thanks," replied the visitor. "I've come on business. My friend is very anxious to run on your engine. Can you permit him to do so?"

"Well, ye see I can, and I can't. If he's seen along o' me I gets fined a sov'reign straight, and put on the black list, maybe."

"Of course he'd pay the money. Besides, I fancy you can easily carry out my wishes. We—my friend and I—have agreed to protect you from the consequences of Amos's death."

"Oh, then, Amos *is* dead, is he? When did he die, sir?"

"Some days ago. *We* alone know the *cause of his death*, and don't want to hurt you; only we like a bit of fun—in fact, a run for our money—so to speak."

"The chap must ha' died precious sudden, then," replied Eldred, with an incredulous smile, which Mr. Ricketts did not understand, and did not like.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"I mean exactly all I say. If Amos *is* dead, he must have died sudden. He was alive a few days ago."

"How do you know?"

"I saw him. He attacked me on my engine, like the mean, revengeful cur he is; and thou says he's dead. When did he die, sir?"

Ricketts paused, and was for the moment confused. If he made a mistake it would be fatal to his plans. But his native pluck came to his aid. So he replied boldly—

"Ten days ago in hospital. On Tuesday week, I should say."

"Then you would say wrong. He was alive on the Wednesday night—and I suspect thee's in some game about him!"

"You are insolent. If I can prove his death, I can prove *you* killed him, and you will be sent to prison—penal servitude, perhaps."

"Prison! Penal servitude!" echoed Molly.

"Yes—I can witness to the blow. Now, Eldred, be sensible. You have promised to give my friend a ride on your engine—say on the mail on Friday night, eh?"

"No, sir—not me! Sorry to hurt yer feelin's, but I ain't goin' to do it!"

"Why, you scoundrel——"

"Come, sir, no names. Scoundrel theeself! Thou'rt up to some capers, I can see. Why did the' tell me Amos is dead? That's a lie!"

"Of course I wouldn't have said so unless I had cause to say so. He was gone, they told me."

"Gone out of hospital, maybe. But excuse me, I'll have no one on my ingin! It's an unlucky one, is *Polyphemus*, and my evil 'genus' is about somewhere. No; the' friend may give up the ride."

"Then mind yourself!" said Ricketts, with rising wrath. "I'll denounce you; you will be arrested, your home broken up, your wife in the workhouse, yourself a felon, and I shall be——"

"Thou shalt be put out of such company as us in a minute. Get away, man, before I mark thee. Clear out! Quiet, Molly—I won't hurt him. Now, Mr. Ricketts, just sling it!"

"Ah, you're a nice, honest engine-driver: takes bribes, and then refuses to do the work he has been paid for! I know something of the line; you'll hear of this, my man—look out!"

"Look out! Ay, I'll look out. There's the dirty money back. Don't think I want the stuff! Not me! Now, sir, we're quits; *quits*, d'ye hear? So we parts; and excuse me—no offence, only I don't want to see thy face again. Good-night!"

"You'll be sorry for this," said Ricketts, who was trying to control his temper. "I'll ruin you!"

"And welcome, if ye can! Ruin me: yes, I b'lieve so, but sha'n't give thee the chance, man. Go—be off. Take my advice, or p'r'aps thee won't get about so soon as Amos."

"Bob dear, be careful," whispered his wife. "Don't say such things."

"Then let him go, lass," replied her husband.

"Now, sir, there's the door—it's open ; it isn't far, and we'd rather have thy room than thy company."

This hint was accompanied by some significant gestures which reminded Mr. Ricketts of the necessity for departure. He contented himself with putting on his hat with evident rudeness, and menacing Eldred.

"Beware!" he said. "I'll crush you sooner or later. You've defied me, and I'll pull you down!"

"Pull away!" laughed the driver. "Take care I don't fall a-top o' thee, man, and smash *thee*! Good-night—we're glad to see thy back!"

Ricketts, uttering some words which need not be set down, flung himself out into the road in a twinkling, and soon disappeared.

"Phew!" exclaimed the engine-driver. "Leave the room door open, Molly, and air the place. That fellow's too scented up for me. He's like a civil cat."

"A *civet* cat, Bob, not civil," she said.

"Well, it's such an unpleasant animal I did wonder why it were called 'civil.' Civet, is it? He's gone, any way. Let's go outside. Oh, here's Mother Fitt—she's in a stew now, I suppose."

"Come in, Mrs. Fitt," said Molly kindly. "How are things with you?"

"Badly, my dear ; my lodger, that Bains, the fireman, is worse than ever. His young woman won't marry him, and he's nigh off his head."

"Why not?" asked Eldred. "What's he done?"

"He's not quite the same lately. He had a knock in the shed, and his head was affected ; and something else, I suppose, happened. At least the girl's father won't permit any meetings, and poor Bains is very bad to-night. He waits vengeance, and he says

he'll 'have it out' with her father next time he's on that turn."

"Who's the father, Mrs. Fitt?" asked Molly Eldred—"anyone we know?"

"A signalman in the Massick cutting; you know him, Mr. Eldred, he's your line: in the box by the lime-pit sidings."

"I know," replied Eldred. "Singleton's his name; and I wish those chalk-pit sidings somewhere else: they'll do something some day on that incline. If a waggon gets thrown out some time it will come a smash down the main line."

"I'm sorry for young Bains, though," said Mrs. Eldred. "Is there anything the matter with him?"

"He's mighty silent and melancholy: he's a brooding sort of chap," replied Mrs. Fitt. "I don't much care for him in the house, for fear he will have a fit or something. Is there danger?"

"Oh, he's harmless enough. He may tackle old Singleton some day, though, for refusing consent," said Eldred. "Never you fear, Mrs. Fitt."

"It isn't the girl's fault, then?" asked his wife.

"Partly so, and mostly the father's. She has gone away to his brother's, and Bains is wild at times. I'm afraid when Fitt's out, and the young man at home, so I come in here for comp'ny."

"Never you fear; Bains won't hurt the', ma'am. Come into the garden and see the lovely night. We were called in by a visitor."

"I see him," replied Mrs. Fitt: "but I'd better be going in. Good-night to ye both—if there's no danger."

The worthy gossip returned to "next door," and made herself as comfortable as possible in the absence of her spouse and the expectation of young Bains,

who was fireman on some local train. But Mrs. Fitt was comforted by the proximity of Mr. Eldred, and her nervous fears were calmed entirely when her husband came in with the news that there was some talk of a strike in "the shops," and he thought it a "jolly good thing too!"

But the unfortunate intelligence as regarded their lodger was that the signalman's daughter, Alice Singleton, was in the country very ill, and not expected to recover.

They did not dare to tell Bains this news; his latest affliction would surely break out if the evil tidings were suddenly conveyed to him. They kept silent, but dreaded the outburst which they imagined would break forth when the news of her illness—maybe of her death—reached her lover.

"Well," said Eldred to his wife, as they sat in the sheltered garden, now less bright and lively, "I don't see why Mother Fitt should bother us with her lodger. He has nothin' to do with me! Still, I think Singleton is wrong."

"Our neighbours' misfortunes, father says, are our opportunities, Bob. You never can tell how things may turn out. I am sorry for Bains."

"So'm I," returned her husband; "but it is not in my way."

This time Eldred was wrong.

Meantime, Mr. Ricketts had reached the neighbourhood of his suburban home. His plans need not be much disturbed by Eldred's defection. A few days would see his plot successful; but he was very angry with Killby, who had tried to carry out his own ends, and had nearly perilled Ricketts' plans. Where was Amos? He must be found and kept in hand.

Nevertheless, Mr. Ricketts returned to his small lodgings in Lambeth with some satisfaction. His measures promised to be successful.

To his astonishment, he encountered Amos on the steps of the house, waiting his arrival.

"Hollo! you here! What do you want? Why do you come here? I said you were dead!"

"Then I am not dead. I want some money, and I'm a trifle thirsty. Let me come in."

Ricketts paused a moment, looking at the man keenly. Then, apparently well satisfied, he invited him with a gesture to enter, and closed the door. The host indicated his sitting-room, and the men entered it together.

Ricketts' plan was a bold one. He would, if necessary, throw the train off the line when the mail-bags had been seized, and attack it. His confederates could enter the locked van in the confusion, and seize the bullion. It was sink or swim with Mr. Ricketts. His speculations had been unlucky, and unless he became possessed of some means in a few days he must fly the country—or kill himself! So he told his accomplices, promising them ample shares of his new plunder, and of profits hereafter.

The "accident" might also depreciate the Railway Stock, and the fall would help him. He was a "bear," and had made up his mind to win the game or "go under!" How he succeeded in his nefarious schemes will be told in good time. Let us pass on.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE "CUTTING"-BOX—AMOS IN EVIDENCE—
THE FOG—HOW THE PLOT PROCEEDED—
"HELP!"

"TING-TING! ting-ting!" The electric bell rings four times in succession in Fellham cutting-box, near Wrockham.

A man with his coat off, a cloth in his hand, glances up and presses a button. "Ting!" farther on.

A bell toned reply, and an answer is given to the first caller: the line is clear ahead, so the signal is lowered in the cutting side on which the signal-box stands, half-way up the bank, near a station.

It is in a breezy situation, and the solitary occupant has an extensive view, in two directions at least. He can see up and down the line, over the brick arch of the road-bridge, and beyond into the darker shaded piece of railway, sheltered by pine and fir, which nearly meet above it. On the other side, a few hundred yards of line, then a curve to the way-side station, and the home signals; an undulating hill clothed with trees extending some distance, and in it a black spot, a tunnel yawning with open mouth, ready to swallow whole trains at a time!

Not a soul in sight, not even a train yet; a flecked sky, a rising wind, a damp feeling, and smell of dead leaves; a thick hazy sunset behind the hill aforesaid, and then a stream of light through the short red-brick tunnel which accentuated the glow.

"There it is again," muttered the signalman.

"It's twice a year it does it, and never without a reason! And a Friday, too!"

The "it" referred to was the distribution of the rays of the setting sun through the arch as the orb sank down behind the slope of the hill: a very curious effect indeed.

"Wonder what will turn up this time?" continued Smith, the signalman, as he gazed at the distant archway, now gradually fading in the lessening light. "Last time we had a burnin' bridge; this time may be something new!"

As his soliloquy ended, his attention was called to the line by the approaching train. It passed his box with a roar and a rattle, speeding to the tunnel in the hill. The steam hung heavily in the damp air, and vanished slowly amidst the trees, above the low mist.

"That's Bob Eldred agen. Ye can tell *Polyphemus* with your eyes shut," muttered Smith, as he let go his lever to put the distant signal at danger, and gave "train on" to the next station. "Ye can tell Bob anywhere."

Then the lonely signalman wiped his lever handles, and entered the time of the passing train and its time of signalling, which he had carefully noted already. "There! Heigho! Wish 'twas relief time!" Then he began to hum an old ballad—a melancholy tale—of which the first verse is as follows—

"The wife of a soldier was starving with hunger,
And close by her side was a poor little lad;
I've seen many children, but never one younger,
Who seemed more depressed at the loss of his dad.
'Oh! where is my father?' the boy kept on asking;
'I wish he would come, for I do feel so cold;'
And then in reply to the little one's asking,
Why this was the tale that the poor mother told."

"Hallo! What do you want? Who sent *you* here?" inquired the signalman. "Heard you was dead!"

"Not yet; gettin' on that way. How's yourself?" replied Amos—for it was he. "I'm nigh dead beat. Been trampin' it."

"Yes, ye look pretty well-nigh done up. What's brought you here?"

"Lookin' for a job," replied the ex-brakesman. "Anything hereaway? What's news? How's your missus?"

"Poorly," replied Smith, touching a bell in response to a warning down. "Blessed if she isn't always poorly! Just enter 4.15 in that book beside ye, mate: right-hand column."

Amos, only too pleased to ingratiate himself further, complied.

"Women's queer things," he remarked, as he inspected the entry he had just made in the ledger; "and I suppose ye don't see much of home most o' the week?"

"Not overmuch; it's pretty much out here: ten hours each turn, and only six off now at night while Ben's away."

"Oh! Ben's away, is he?" remarked Amos. "I wish I could help ye, mate."

"You couldn't manage it," replied Smith; "and if you could you wouldn't like it. There's not much doin' here o' nights, though; the goods don't shunt here often."

"There's some trains, I s'pose, though?" continued Amos, leading up to a definite issue.

"Ay, the mail: she goes through; and then the fast goods; then the pick-up goods, and about three up trains. I'm off at eight to-night."

"Suppose ye couldn't gi' me a shake-down, could ye, Fred?"

"Well, no, I couldn't: not just now; ye see the fam'ly's pretty much at our place, and the missus's sister is on a visit."

"I'm sorry, as I haven't the price of a bed," continued Amos; "and I'm dog-tired. Ye couldn't let me lie about here, could ye? I'm sure to sleep."

"Well, you see, my mate mightn't like it if I did. Only you're a friend, so to say, and it could be done—if he didn't mind ye. But it ain't reg'lar."

"No, it ain't reg'lar; but it's in no one's way," pleaded Amos. "The night's comin' on bad, and it's weary trampin'. Can't ye lend me a bob or so?" he asked anxiously.

Smith shook his head. Amos looked by no means disappointed; indeed, he seemed relieved.

"Well, let me lie here till your mate comes on; you can turn me out then, if ye like. It'll be a rest, any way."

"Oh! stay if ye like; ye won't be in *my* way," replied easy-going Smith. "No one will come up here to-night now; the signals are lighted, and all snug. Stay, and welcome."

Amos appeared quite contented. He had his plans.

"Wasn't that Bob Eldred as I saw go by just now?" he asked presently.

"Ay; he's drivin' the mail on his turn this week. He's been on a short trip, I suppose. Ned Allen and him drive it now, I b'lieve. Here's the express—and look at the fog! It's risin' like steam yonder by the river. A thick night!"

"Much obliged to ye, Fred; it's a true charity,"

replied this hypocrite, as he lay down at the end of the box. "So Bob's gettin' on?"

"So they say. He got the best o' you, I hear, didn't he?"

"Ay, did he," replied Amos; "but I'll be even with him. He took Molly away from me, and, by Jingo, I'll pay him out!"

"Don't look like it yet, any way," said the signal-man, as he pulled a couple of levers.

"What's them for?" inquired Amos, with more interest in his eyes than in his voice.

"Down signals—home and distance: when they're off, line's clear, ye know."

"O' course. Well, I'll just lie quiet, and be off when your mate comes. Don't mind me, Fred."

Smith made no answer. He booked the time and waited. The fog increased rapidly, and soon filled the valley. The trains loomed through the mist, and the steam hung about in curling wreaths over the hills and the trees. Night fell, and a silence, only broken by the whistles or the echoes of approaching or departing trains, wrapped the signal-box as in a shroud. The birds had long before retired; the lamps in the station were soon blotted out, and the gas in the box burned in a halo, like a sickly moon in the fog.

Of all weathers encountered in locomotive work, the fog is the most dangerous and depressing. To have to run, or even, from an engine's view of the case, to "crawl," along an almost invisible track, not knowing what obstructions may present themselves, nor whether signals are on or off until the engine is close upon them, is a very trying experience.

The only method in a fog at night, when plate-layers or "foggers" are about more sparsely, is to

glance up at the signal as you pass under it. The halo of green or red will give the driver the hint necessary for his guidance at the "distance." Some reader may wonder how the engine-men can find the signal at all in a fog, but no driver worthy of the name is unaware of the localities and positions of the signals on the route.

Some are perched high on an embankment ; so if the weather be very thick the chances of catching sight of the lamp are very small indeed ; but when the post is fixed in the permanent way, and speed is slackened at the known place, a quick reading is possible, and the desired information is often obtained even in a fog. The home signal is protected by the "fogger," who is furnished with detonating signals, which "bang " out a warning.

The starting signals are supplied with low-placed semaphores just above the platform, and these being visible from the foot-plate and platform to driver and guard, the train is not unnecessarily delayed. The line is then cleared to the next cabin, and if no alarm occur there, the driver may calculate on an open course still farther.

Amos was, of course, acquainted with all the practical part of this, and as he lay feigning sleep, he was puzzling himself over the manner in which he could catch the mail, and Eldred tripping. He hated the engine-driver with all the jealous hatred of which his mean and ungenerous nature was capable. If he could run him off the road and get him into a scrape, his satisfaction would be immense ; and not on that account alone. He had his private ends to serve, and to his mind—a low-class mind—the revenge which would cripple his former rival would be sweet indeed, even if he had not already received a substantial sum,

and a promise of a larger one if he could by any means, fair or foul, stop the train, and enable the robbers to seize the precious freight.

"Cynical Jack" and his taciturn accomplice, whom we have named Number One, as the leaders of the gang of miscreants, had chosen their scene admirably. Ricketts, of course, did not appear in the business to anyone except his immediate intimates, and to Amos, whom he could not prevent from knowing his position. But he knew Killby for a coward and a bully, and had him in his clutches.

Amos had instructions to "get round the signalman," whom he knew, and in such a small place, at such an unimportant station, assistance would be long in coming, even if the fog, which was of immense value to the conspirators, had not rendered help most difficult of attainment. The gang would travel by the train, which would be stopped beyond the station in the cutting, and if any serious accident happened, all the worse for Eldred and his mate.

Amos had performed his portion of the hateful task with some skill, and had taken up his quarters in the box. He was armed, so when Smith's "relief" arrived he intended to overpower him, and stop the train by the simple method of piling a few sleepers on the metals, when, in the confusion, the desired robbery could be effected. Favoured by the darkness, and an accomplice in the guard and, he hoped, on the engine, the boxes could be taken, the mail-bags rifled, and a splendid *coup* worked out!

These were the arrangements which the desperate Mr. Ricketts had conceived, and it must be confessed that they lacked nothing in boldness of conception or in recklessness of performance. Rogues are often the best served in this world.

Time in the signal-cabin passed somewhat slowly. Smith once more solitary—for the crafty Amos was too wise to recall himself to notice—began his monotonous chant anew, and got over the first verse again in the droning monotone most appropriate to such a production. The refrain gave the cue to the whole ditty :—

“ ‘He’ll be back by-and-bye, it is true all I’ve told you ;
So cheer up, my darling, so don’t sob and cry.
Your father, my lad, is a brave British soldier ;
Though torn from us now, he’ll be back by-and-bye.’ ”

“Wish *I* could be back,” muttered the signal-man. “The missus will be savage if Matt’s late again. This fog isn’t reassurin’ any way.”

He peeped out, pushing back the sliding case-ment for the purpose, but could not distinguish even the foot of the slope on which the signal-cabin stood.

“It’s mortal thick,” he muttered. “A few of the ‘hangers’ wouldn’t hurt, I’m thinkin.’ I’ll put a couple down presently. Perhaps that fellow would do a trifle of foggin’ for a couple o’ shillin’s.”

He quitted his post of imperfect observation, and closed the sliding window. Within, all was warm and comparatively bright. Amos still lay apparently in a sound sleep—the deep trance of utter exhaustion seemed to have enwrapped him closely, and he could not be disturbed without considerable exertion and attention, which just then Smith had to dispense to his levers and instruments.

A rumbling, roaring sound, like the exaggerated noise of a milkman’s cart on the road : this was an up train in the cutting. It pulled up opposite the signal-box for some information, the driver being somewhat puzzled respecting signals.

A seething, hissing, glowing mass opposite. In the glare which illuminated the thick low mist were discovered two spectral pea-jacketed forms, the driver and fireman of the train, which was hardly distinguishable behind them, a tiny row of dim lights being all that indicated the presence of some fourteen coaches, with the usual complement of passengers. A fearsome blackness overspread the land, and a sense of confusion and unreality was carried to the mind by the swirling clouds of fog and rising steam.

One of the spectres spoke. "All clear, mate?"

"Ay! ye can run on to Bansden right away. There's nothin' in front of ye from here. Good-night; good luck to ye."

"Good-night," replied the spectre, as he turned on the steam. In a moment the glow had been swallowed up in the fog, the lighted carriages flickered past, bumping rhythmically over the switches, faster and faster; then a long sustained whistle as the engine approached the station, a ruddy gleam of two blood-red eyes glaring for a second or two in anger from the rear-van of the train, and King Fog once more shrouded the cutting in dense clouds and thick darkness.

Six o'clock—seven o'clock; trains came and went. The needles of the instruments quivered and ticked. The miniature signal-posts—tell-tale fac-similes of the great high semaphores now almost invisible to the signalman—rose and fell, moved by electric currents sent from signal-cabins up and down, two miles and more away in either direction. Over these our signalman had no control. He knew they worked with *his* corresponding little signals in those other boxes, which he, not the other men, could move. So a tell-tale repeater stood at "danger" in his cabin

so long as the true signal, so far off, was also at "danger."

Seven o'clock struck from the white-faced clock above him: a full, bold stroke, quite unlike the nervous, energetic, sharp ringing of the bells in the electric instruments. Eight o'clock; Smith had entirely forgotten Amos in the corner. His mind was getting somewhat foggy, too: and he only hoped that Matt would now appear to take the place he did not dare to quit until the other man arrived. The fog had clouded his bodily and mental vision; ten hours' duty had laid its weary hands upon his brain, and Fred Smith cursed his dilatory comrade.

"This isn't the first time he's played this game," muttered the poor signalman. "I'll wait ten minutes and then block the line; human natur' and flesh and blood can't stand another spell o' this."

As he thus communed with himself he opened the door of the signal-cabin and peered out into the fog, which circled in driving clouds about the cutting in the draught and light of the cabin, but stood in impenetrable walls of apparently solid blackness on the lower slopes outside.

"Here he comes," muttered Smith, as a sound of stumbling and crunching became audible. "What cher, Matt! This way."

"What cher! I'd lost my way a'most if I hadn't a tripped over the wire and followed of it up," said a short, insignificant-looking man, slowly. "The traffic will be stopped, I expect, mostly, if it's like this yonder. Ye can't see yer hand afore yer face. Any news?"

"All's clear, Matt; the slow passenger's gone up, ten minutes behind, and got away from Bansden. The box-goods is nigh due, ye know, and then the mail—she'll be in time, any way."



"IF YOU LEAVE YOUR BOX YOU'LL BE SHOT!" (see p. 145).

off the hooks just beyond the station, where the apparatus was put up. Amos was aware of the means by which the bags were thrown out and collected into the net. He had only to wait by the apparatus, and overcome the unsuspecting clerk, who would come in his usual casual manner for the letters.

Killby had studied the situation. He was "on sick leave," he declared, nursing his strength, and for a couple of days had been observant of every detail. He saw the careless manner—the apparently careless manner—in which bags of letters, parcels, and packages were thrown about, or "chucked" aside as of no value. He had noted this, and made his arrangements. If the bags were suspended he would sweep them off himself, and secure the arriving bags also. His friends in ambush by the bridge were ready to help; the pony-trap would accommodate them all, and fortune was smiling at him.

But the fog prevented him from fully appreciating the smiles of the fickle goddess.

Yet surely he is in luck! The bags are there! He creeps along the line towards the bridge over the lane, where in the dripping silence of the misty darkness waits the honest pony and the thievish master, looking almost part of the hedge. But such concealment is needless. The fog prevents traffic, and Ricketts is thus unseen, in accordance with his agreement with Amos, made on his return in the interview in the Lambeth lodgings.

These scoundrels are true to each other, at any rate. They are indeed fortunate: the man in the signal-box shut in; no one about in the fog; no one visible a yard off! There can be no difficulty in

stealing the coveted mails, and in subsequently rifling the lock-up vans.

For there are confederates in the train. This robbery was only one of a series planned, and defeated only by railway vigilance. There were some traitors—two already dead by “accident”—a guard and gambler, who had sold himself to do this wickedness, and a clerk, a needy post-office youth, inside the van, who promised to assist for a consideration. Money had been spent, and then terrorism had been invoked. They knew the power wielded by Ricketts, who might, they believed, at any time hand them over to justice while escaping himself. All was ready!

Matthew Gongs is puzzled in his high perch, as he receives and answers signals, and stares helplessly through the low-lying creeping fog in the cutting. What did Amos mean? Now, if the brakesman had said nothing at all, but had merely quitted the box and bade its occupant “Good-night,” Matt Gongs would not have troubled his brain about his visitor. But Amos was too particular; he wanted to make sure, and consequently he rather over-reached himself. A little less display would have effected the purpose better.

“He’s locked the door, has he? Now, why did he do that? What’s he up to? Some mischief, unless it’s only a lark! But it’s a queer night for larks, to be sure; and Amos ain’t quite the man for ‘larks,’ either! I’m in fear something’s wrong. Here comes the mail ‘on’ now. All clear? Yes, my lad, come along.”

He pressed the knobs, cleared the line, and looked out—not because he expected to see anything, but because he usually did so: it was a habit to look up and down. But this time his trained gaze beheld

something on the metals. The fog, drifting along like smoke, occasionally lifted, and displayed a section of railway, a slope of bank, a few trunks of trees, and again shrouded the scene in its mantle. The tops of the trees were sometimes visible, as was the high green ("line clear") light on the embankment of the cutting.

But on the down line lay a dark mass!

Was it a man's body, or an obstruction of another kind?

Matt Gongs' heart beat almost as loudly as his bells when the idea of obstruction occurred to him. The mail was "on," and was rushing perhaps to destruction in the cutting—on to its destination headlong! If he stopped it he would get into trouble; if he passed it on it might be wrecked. There could be no harm in warning the next up block. He would—no! Was he not mistaken? Surely—no! There is the black mass on the line beyond his box. The mist is passing away before the rising wind, and there is no doubt.

Too late to utter any warning now! The signal-box below the hill has passed the mail on, and Matt must act for himself. He wavers. His hands half move the lever, the signal arm goes partly up, and then is clear again. With a sudden impulse he lets it go—a jingle of wires; the red eye meets the mail—then unexpectedly two detonations are heard—a long and some short, sharp whistles, a grinding of brakes, and the mail train, driven by Robert Eldred, runs nearly through the station, and pulls up just outside the signal-box, half a mile beyond the platform.

A commotion—a shouting: exclamations of horror are mingled with the signalman's hail—

"Come up here and break in this door, will ye? I'm locked up! There's something ahead! Help!"

Let us now turn back to *Polyphemus* for awhile, and explain his movements before he proceeds farther.

CHAPTER XIV.

POLYPHEMUS AND THE MAIL TRAIN—A DIM PROSPECT
—A GLIMPSE OF DANGER—"PULL UP!"—FATE
OF AMOS KILLBY.

"BACK half an inch for the couplin's, mate!"

A whizzing of steam for a second, a sudden lifting and shutting of the regulator, a hasty application of the steam-brake, and our hero *Polyphemus* touches his tender buffers with those of the front van of the mail train.

Polyphemus is as anxious as ever for the start, and his master is more than usually anxious concerning his train. Eldred, as he goes carefully round his engine, oil-feed in one hand, a wisp of "waste" in the other, cannot tell when the anticipated evil may befall him. It is true that his fears of "something" have been almost rallied out of him by his wife: that Mr. Cannon had derided his suspicions, and made light of any "accident" such as the driver had hinted at. He knew Eldred as a superstitious man—as a believer in omens; and being hard, practical, and utterly unsentimental, Cannon had pooh-poohed the suggestions timidly advanced by Eldred, who had no positive reasons for his suspicions.

So it happened that Mr. Cannon had walked away, and had heard nothing of the stranger who had asked to come on the engine at Wrockham for the ride to Wexthorpe. Had Eldred been able to advance any serious reason for his fears, no doubt the district superintendent would have mentioned the matter to his superior—a mighty man in his line. But to carry such “a cock-and-a-bull” to Mr. Overdean would be preposterous!

Nevertheless, Eldred kept his own counsel and his own opinions just the same after that. He did not confide in his new mate, and hardly addressed him. Friday came: he took a short trip and then back, to be ready for the mail, which would leave at 8.45 p.m. A change of engines at Wexthorpe, and home again at 1 o'clock a.m. This was his round that week, from half-past mid-day until past midnight.

The station is brilliant with lamps, and noisy with the bustle of preparation. Many loaded luggage-trucks are deposited by the porters at the van doors. Eldred strolls down the platform, having inspected his couplings, and counts his load. Twelve on! Quite sufficient. A mist hangs outside the station, and fog is reported in South London. The station-master sees to the lamps, and the greaser to the wheels. The bustle increases; but Eldred examines the compartments to find Mr. Ricketts. But he, like Fairfax at the trial of Charles the First, “had more wit than to be there!” So Eldred returned to his mate, who was rapidly finishing a hasty supper as he leaned against the “weather-board,” and kept his eye on the gauges.

Time is up. The fireman leans out to catch the guard's signal-lamp, for the whistle will be lost in the uproar of the just escaping steam. Eldred is in his place on the right-hand side of the engine, awaiting

the familiar permission to turn on the steam. His face is thoughtful and somewhat anxious, but he makes no remark then.

"Right away!" suddenly shouts the fireman, holding up his hand to the driver, while he himself keeps his head still turned to the platform. He sees that all is clear: that the dozen coaches are all attached, that no passenger is in danger from a sudden rush. Right away! The guards wave lamps to each other, the train bumps, "clang, clang" faster and faster over the turn-tables, and *Polyphemus* darting spurts of steam from the cylinder taps, just to clear off the water, begins his journey, of which no one knows the ending. His course has to be run, and who can tell what may befall him ere he reach his goal? No one. On through the night into the clinging fog and smoke, the furnace flare in the murky air overhead, the rattling wheels below, the rumble of the heavy coaches, and the roar of bridges announcing his progress.

Now past the suburbs, the dark roofs and dim alleys; the network of dismal dripping eaves and slimy pavements on each side—the lighted windows revealing peeps of domestic life above stairs, "illuminated" by guttering candles haloed in mist. On, under the signal-bridge and over many girder-bridges, over roads, past evil-smelling dust-heaps, and anon by horrid brick-fields smoking in the heavy air, and tasting flat and dusty on the palate. Phew!

On with a scream into a pattern of green and red lamps continually changing, though one eye will remain steady until *Polyphemus* has passed by, when it will turn bloodshot suddenly, and glare angrily through the ever-increasing white mist lying low on the wet fields, and hugging the streamlet as it

meanders by the hedge. Away by rushing hedges, whistling loudly, bent on keeping time, though heaven fall, goes *Polyphemus*; held well in hand, curbed by the lever, reined by the regulator, and checked by the brakes.

The steam is shut off; the brakes are applied—Wrockham Junction! More red and green lamps, all mixed up, separate themselves rapidly, sort themselves skilfully, and run away into the distance when the lights one fancied one was standing near are approached; as coy young suitors rush away on the approach of "father."

A man soon came up to *Polyphemus*, to read his baptismal name upon the wheel-casing.

"A fine engine, driver! I am going to have a ride, am I not?"

Eldred crossed over to the fireman's side of the foot-plate, next the platform, leaned his arms upon the rail, and examined his interlocutor. His face was not easily to be distinguished; his voice was not unpleasant, but Eldred replied—

"Well, I ain't so sure about that, mister!"

"Oh, I understood that I was to go: but if not agreeable, I will get inside."

"Who told you?"

"Mr. Ricketts—he said that you promised me a trip to-night."

"Once I did say so; but I've changed my mind. If you will bring me a pass I'll let you up: if you can't get leave, then you can't ride—that's business!"

"Then you won't let me ride on your engine?"

"No, sir, I won't—not to-night, any way—it's too dangerous."

The man turned away; and, after a while, Eldred,

who still kept looking out, saw him in conversation with the guard, and with three other men subsequently. The applicant for a ride on the engine was accommodated by the guard in his van, and the other passengers, his friends, took their places in the train, after exchanging signs.

"Look out, Jack!" said Eldred to his fireman. "Keep your eye on the train behind—your side. There's a gang of sharpers in this mail, and we must keep our eyes open, mate."

"Ay, ay!" replied Jack, as he threw open the fire-door, which glared so fiercely that it made his eyes blink, and prevented him from seeing anything distinctly for a while; and as the train pulled through the fog, little could be seen but the gleam of the double sets of lamps in the mail-van, where a busy scene was being performed before a very limited audience—in fact, to no audience at all, for all those within are actors.

We may look in as *Polyphemus* cleaves the mist, which closes like water behind him. The sorting-van is an interesting sight. Picture a long lofty railway carriage, in direct communication with its fellows by an enclosed platform over the couplings, and filled up with pigeon-holes, shelves, and a kind of counter, on which a miscellaneous mass of letters has been deposited.

From this mound of correspondence the sorting-clerks pick the letters at random, and throw them with unerring accuracy into the various pigeon-holes, each receptacle having the name of the town underneath it. From these pigeon-holes the letters are taken and put into the bags in the order of the distance from the starting-point. The first to be reached are the first served. Newspapers and

parcels are also dealt with : packed, sealed, and delivered in order with extraordinary accuracy in other vans.

The men in this van are all busy—one alone seems nervous and anxious. He is on the look-out for something, and he takes the registered letters into his charge to enter them.

Meanwhile, *Polyphemus* has been running on through the mist, heedless where he goes as long as he goes safely. He does not like the fog : he may trip at any moment, and go over a point or run "by accident" into a siding, and crush himself to death against stop buffers. His driver can see no low signals—he glances up, catches a gleam, listens for a bang, or for some other warning. None comes ! The passengers have no fears ; they muffle themselves in rugs and capes and plaids, smoke, chatter, or are silent, reading with the help of carriage-lamps placed in the window-frame or hooked to the lining.

Some people look out, and vainly try to distinguish the country through which the train is passing, sending drops in showers from the leaves and branches. A heavy "goods" passes, jingling and jangling, lumbering along in ghostly fashion. A hill is in front, and through its now invisible face is driven a tunnel, which is filled with mist and with the smoke left behind by the "goods" aforesaid, sulphurous and grimy.

But *Polyphemus*, bent on doing his duty like an Englishman, pushes into the mouth of the tunnel, which is almost indistinguishable as it slowly pours forth smoke and fumes of steam ; up the incline, rattling inside the hill, then over the topmost level ; and roaring, clanking, slapping the strata with flat bunches of echoes until the driver and fireman are

nearly deaf. On he goes unchecked, and into comparative silence outside the red-brick-faced hole which roars with demon cries behind him.

"A quarter-past ten, mate. We're behind to-night," shouts Eldred to his fireman, who only nods and opens the fire-door, shedding a lurid glare around and overhead, making the mist ruddy and the steam bright. Beyond the curve is the Fellham station, and high on the embankment above the cutting is the green light of the signal showing through the mist, which is not so high as the post there. A curious scene: the mail-vans and the train, the rapid engine, the flashing fire, the rolling mists, shutting all in, and closing upon the train like a curtain! It has gone into the depths, passed away like man into the unknown, shrouded in mystery, and unable to say or to imagine what awaits him beyond the veil. Gone!

Another scene.

Fred Smith, the signalman, has finished his supper. He lives in a small neat cottage beyond the Fellham station, where he grows peas, potatoes, and beans, with some homely fruits in the cabbage patch. He cultivates some geraniums in his window too, and his wife, when equal to it, washes for "the gentlefolks." Smith will not go to bed until the mail passes. Besides, on this particular evening he declares he has "no call" to go to bed. He will remain in the small parlour, with its shell decorations and cheap china ornaments, until the doctor comes, or the news is carried down respecting his "missus." So he waits, puffs his pipe by the lamp-light, and listens for the mail—mayhap for the other arrival upstairs.

"A quarter after ten," he mutters. "She can't be

far off" (this refers to the train); "Bob ain't a man to check her over-much. But I don't hear her!"

"Ten twenty-two: why, she is late! The mist must be pretty thick there! She should be gone by now. I'll step out and listen. Hullo! there she is—she's run over the signals!" But when he turns and sees the signal up at red, and staring steadily, he rushes off.

"What's the matter there, I wonder? The whistle is loud enough. What's Matt about to put the lamp on so sudden? What's up?"

He could see nothing distinctly; but the whistling, the escaping steam, knowledge of locality, and the red lamp, all tended to lead Smith to the spot where he believed some catastrophe had happened. Something had gone wrong with the mail, everyone who heard the whistling knew, and the continued bellowing of the deep brake whistle still announced danger to the country three miles round.

Fred Smith was not surprised to hear the fog-signals; he had placed them on the line himself, to protect and warn the signal-cabin and his relief man, Matt, the new hand. If Ben, the usual signaller, had been present, Fred Smith would not have troubled to put the "bangers" down, knowing his mate would be on the alert, and look out in time. But of Matt he was not so certain; therefore he had laid the signals on the metals when he went home, knowing the mail would pass down first of the few night trains.

He reached the scene of the "accident," as he deemed it, in about five minutes. The small station was all in darkness, and he could just, with practised eyes, discern that one of the signals was half off. The down "home" semaphore discs were by some means jammed; perhaps the wires had caught. But

in any case the train had stopped, and was fizzing loudly. Turmoil was audible as he approached, and when he did arrive the state of the case was not immediately apparent either to the mental or physical perceptions.

The train had pulled up close to the signal-box, and he could hear shouting and cries. Some men on the off-side seemed busy at one of the vans, but until Smith crossed over to the train nothing was clear. Then it became apparent that something had happened in the sorting-van: that someone had put some sleepers on the metals: and that Matt Gongs was shouting for assistance, and the wires were jammed.

The passengers quickly hurried out; and the fog, which was slowly clearing away, permitted them to understand the state of affairs. Eldred, the engine-driver, and one guard having perceived the attempt to break into a van, constituted themselves its protectors, armed with a rod and a hammer. The engine was not off the line; the train had been pulled up by three causes acting almost simultaneously, each perfectly independent of the other.

The fog-signals had warned Eldred—not stopped him; the signal from the box had checked him, but the electric communication from the Post-Office van had alarmed him.

As the train had run through the station pretty fast, the electric bell sounded “Stop!” The warning had come from the sorting-van, and thither he hurried first.

“What is it?”

An accident! The poor clerk whose duty it was to suspend the mail-bags on the apparatus had been too dilatory, and his head had been severed from his

body! The bags and the man's head had all come into the van in the net, hence the command to stop!

Eldred looked in as others crowded round; and in the net with the blood-stained mail-bags—a horrible sight—lay the head of *Amos Killby*! The features still wore a grim smile of triumph, pale and smeared as they were!

Eldred uttered an exclamation of disgust and backed out. Then something occurred to him, and seeking the guard, he communicated his suspicions. These were confirmed by the appearance of the gang, who were forced to retreat when the passengers, all uninjured, came to the assistance of the guard.

The details of the nefarious plan, so well thought out by Ricketts, then unfolded themselves to Eldred. The passenger for the engine—and in the van after—the friends of this man, the locked van, the specie, the heavy and valuable mails, were all pieces of the puzzle now being solved by Eldred and his mate. The sleepers on the line, the dead man, the imprisoned signalman, and, above all, the pony-trap!

It was found with one dread occupant—no driver in the seat! The pony in the shafts remained true and steady, half asleep, but entirely unconscious of the presence of the headless body of Amos Killby, which had fallen upon, and half-stunned, his employer, who was then lying, out of sight, in the dank and blood-stained ditch—Ricketts himself!

His splendid *coup* had missed! All his well-considered evil schemes had been scattered and had failed! Primarily, his failure was due to the forethought of Smith the signalman, but mostly to his

agent's carelessness. He had tried, and failed. Killby had paid the penalty of his rashness, and when Ricketts arose, and realised the situation, and recognised the headless trunk, he hurried off half mad, cursing his luck and himself, and haunted by the fate of his accomplice which the gipsy had foretold!

CHAPTER XV.

POLYPHEMUS IN A QUANDARY—CERES ON THE LINE—RUN OVER!

BUT the busy officials did not at first know what had happened at the bridge. They knew, of course, that the "accident," or rather the attempt at robbery, had taken place there; but of the presence of the pony-trap and its driver, above all of the ghastly burden it carried, they were ignorant. The discovery came later; at the inquest all was made clear.

The history of the tragedy was gathered from different sources. Eldred told how he and *Polyphemus* were running steadily when the train emerged from the tunnel; he explained how the signal far away in the cutting side showed out like a green lighthouse lamp, amid a placid sea of fog. He proved the explosion of the detonators, and the signalman Smith confessed to having placed them there. He testified to the clear sky overhead which he had seen from the top of the cutting when he had gone up to inspect a lamp on the post.

So the evidence came out, and we need not again refer to the subject. Mr. Ricketts was sought for, but he had disappeared. The ports were watched: he was very much wanted, and if he were not captured people said it would be extraordinary. The trap and he were associated and known.

But we are anticipating a little. Eldred proceeded on his journey from Fellham as soon as possible, and on his return home in safety, his wondering wife wrote out the report.

When Mr. Cannon heard of the interruption of the mail, and the daring attempt at robbery, he uttered language which need not be written in this book. The extraordinary death of Amos, the dramatic incident in the signal-cabin, the foresight of the signal-man Smith, and the promptitude of Eldred, found expression in the coroner's court and in the newspapers; but Mr. Cannon's comments remained, and must remain, unpublished: not because they were irrelevant—far from that; but because they were, if anything, *too* pointed!

When the inquest was over, and when the rewards and congratulations had been distributed, Eldred found himself once more on *Polyphemus*, in the same position as he had been previously to his adventure, but with a promise of preferment.

"Well, my beauty!" thought the driver one morning, as he oiled the slide-bars and the motion, "they may say what they like, but for me and thee there would have been a 'tip up' on a large scale! Halloa, Jack! all right?"

"Yes, I'm all right," replied the fireman. "Have you heard any more o' that party?"

"Never a word. But look you here! Here's a pretty state o' things; the boiler's red-hot! I'm hanged

if there's a drop o' water in it! Oh, Mister 'Turner,' thou'lt catch it warm for this!"

The fireman immediately dropped out the fire, and Eldred went in search of the man whose duty it was to see the engine properly equipped.

"See this," he cried, indicating the glowing embers of the rejected fire. "See this," he continued, pointing to the heated empty boiler; "not content wi' fillin' up the tender wi' coals *after* the engine's cleaned, but he's givin' no water at all. My turn's up now; the' must send t' other ingin, and I'm hanged if I drive her!"

"Here, what's your sayin'?" cried an authoritative voice: "not drive; then you can 'sling it' out of here, my lad!"

"Well, who's to drive an ingin' with red-hot boiler?" cried Eldred angrily. "Whose fault's that?"

The foreman looked grave; the turner and the fire-lighter had been grave some time before. They all knew it meant a "carpeting," and perhaps dismissal for one or two. What was to be done?

"You're booked on the eleven express, Eldred, and out you go. Take *Ceres*; she's in steam, and will run well enough if you're careful with her."

Eldred grunted, and did not jump at the suggestion. "She's an old cripple," he said.

"Cripple or not, she must go out to-day; so run her down to the coal-stages and have her filled up. There's no time to lose."

Eldred knew that he must obey. *Polyphemus* would not be cool in time to fill the boiler and get down to the station. But the driver and his mate grumbled loudly, and felt some grim satisfaction in the knowledge that the man who lighted the fire

without supplying the water, or having seen it supplied, would be presented with "the Most Noble Order of the Sack!"

A misfortune for the driver and fireman of *Polyphemus*, certainly; but these "accidents" will happen sometimes even in the best-regulated sheds, and the Great Wexthorpe was not always the best managed.

The engine *Ceres* now allotted to Eldred was a single engine of a somewhat antiquated pattern, which could do a good record on the level or down-hill, with a medium load; but when any rising ground intervened, then the *Ceres* and others of her class became "curs"; they had no pluck, and had either to requisition a pilot or lose time. This accounted for the frequent unpunctuality of the long west expresses, which had been a standing reproach to a line progressing in other respects, in spite of its locomotive shortcomings.

Naturally Eldred found fault with the big make-shift. *Ceres* was a larger engine, but looked unwieldy beside *Polyphemus*. The huge single wheel on each side indicated speed, but she had no "reserve power," and got "cowed" under a load on a "bank." Now, Eldred prided himself on keeping time. He did not "make up" much, but he seldom lost any. If delayed, he booked it, and "two minutes late startin'" meant two minutes late in arrival. He ran true to time-table speed. He made a last appeal to the foreman.

"Can't I have a coupled ingin? Who's to run those banks with this cripple?"

"Take it or leave it," was the uncompromising rejoinder; and Eldred took it, knowing he "couldn't do nowt wi' it," as he said.

The reason was this, and we may in a few words

explain his views. Eldred knew, as all locomotive engine-men know, that unless an engine has a reserve power over her load she is useless on a gradient. The *Ceres* could pull her own weight, and something more, at a fine pace along a level road, but if the rise of even one in two hundred and twenty should be met with, her traction power must be doubled. It is no unusual thing to find a rise of one in one hundred, or in ninety; thus the *Ceres*, and such old "single" locomotives, would have to develop about three and a half times the power they would require on the level.

So Bob Eldred and his mate were quite disgusted at the prospect before them.

"How's we to keep time without a pilot? and there's the Bansden Tunnel," he muttered. "Well, if we're behind, it won't be my fault!"

Eldred took the engine down to the train. The weather was against his keeping time with such an engine, for the rails were slippery in consequence of a drizzling rain; but there was plenty of sand in the boxes, and the slipping could be reduced to a minimum.

As the driver backed slowly down with the steam off, he took out his running time-table, and looked over his "run." He had already read the notices of changes and alterations, ballast trains, slewing of lines, etc., which are printed, and supposed to be read by every engine-man as he goes on duty. (We have one of these pamphlets of notices beside us—a relic of long ago, when the writer was running "express," and it fills eight pages of foolscap.)

These notices are generally issued every week, and in them all proposed alterations of stations, lines, repairs, and shunting instructions are laid down, with

notices for the alterations of signals, points, and many other matters. The service time-book is another thing, and is sometimes a bulky roll, which the driver keeps in his locker, and this time-book Eldred was studying as he backed down.

In this "roll of a book" are recorded the running times of all the trains, the length of stoppages, the shunting hours, and direction of shunting of slow trains; and not only that, but the time of *passing* each place is set down. So the reader will perceive a few of the elaborate precautions which the railway companies take, not only to ensure punctuality, but to guard against accidents.

But the engines should not be overloaded, and when there is any doubt whatever, a pilot engine should always be attached to the train; for the extra expense is preferable to a breakdown.

The *Ceres* was ready, and Eldred waiting. Regretting his *Polyphemus*, he was nevertheless interested in his work, and determined to do his duty. "Right away!"

Very slowly does the express start. The big wheels take a long time to move, but when they do move they continue going. The road is familiar, but the engine requires continual attention, and Eldred's anxiety is not diminished when he reflects upon the Bansden incline, and the tunnel on the summit; but he finds some compensating consolation in the down grade and the level run afterwards to Wexthorpe, where refreshments of a class by no means "first" are distributed at high charges.

Ceres had a "pull" up the hill. She coughed and panted, and slipped her wheels, and, in fact, behaved as such an engine might have been expected to behave on an incline. Yet with care, and firing and

humouring her, as Bob knew how to do, the engine was persuaded to reach the tunnel, but entered it almost out of breath.

"Thank the Lord!" said Eldred piously. "We're up that bank, mate; and we shall be all right. Drat thee! go along now thou shalt!"

Ceres complied. She had made a gallant effort, and was, presumably, very much pleased with herself. The remainder of the run to Wexthorpe was child's play, and she ran so well that the train pulled up to the platform "on time" to a moment.

As Eldred—who had to continue his run to Bounstal—was inspecting his engine, he caught sight of a face he knew. This was the well-remembered countenance of Mr. Ricketts, but somewhat changed. The moustache had disappeared, and a thin side-whisker was conspicuous on the heavy jaws. But there was no mistaking the shifting eyes, the rather arched nose, and, above all, the heavy under-lip of a mouth prone to enjoyment, and typical of a love of luxury and "material" pleasures.

"There's that scoundrel who nearly did for us, Jack! Look, he's off! I'd like to trace him."

Eldred stepped off his engine and made for the refreshment-room, in which direction Mr. Ricketts had gone; but when the engine-driver reached it he could not find the man he wanted, and after a futile search he left the place.

"That man is my 'evil genus,'" remarked Eldred, with precise terms of speech unusual to him. "My evil genus! I'd give a dollar to have him taken up."

"What for, mate?"

"What for? Why, for nigh smashin' the mail! What for?" he repeated scornfully. "I'd gi' him

'*what for*' if I had him! He's sent to do somethin'; he's an 'evil genus'!"

"You're a bit of a croaker, Bob: that's what you are! Now, is it in human natur' that jest because we sees a certain person that anything will happen? Not it!"

"No, Jack, it ain't in *human* natur'; it's in super-human natur', though," replied the superstitious engine-driver.

"Well, we can't hunt any more for him," said the fireman; "and I suspect he's not in the train at all."

The signal was given, and *Ceres* started for her run to Bounstal, where she would hook off, and after a while return with the up fast train late in the afternoon. The trip included no stoppages, and in an hour the end of that engine's journey was reached. Eldred had run one hundred and twenty miles at an average speed of fifty miles an hour, and was punctual in arrival at his destination, though he had had some "heavy" working. He had now only to return home. Meantime, he had a couple of hours at his disposal.

Taking his engine to the running-shed, he handed her over to the relief men, and swung down to the drivers' cabin to have a smoke, hear the news, and to exchange views and sentiments with his mates. There he found some of the fellows, and a lively discussion ensued; many anecdotes were related, and the general affairs of the line were discussed with freedom.

"Great doin's here in the next month," remarked a "turner." "The Queen and all the fam'ly's comin' to open a library, or some other institution."

"It's the Prince o' Wales is comin', Tim—the Prince and Princess?"

"No; it's the Queen: the boss told me so. And she'll come by our road because she hates the other one."

"Ay, I mind she never travels on it," remarked the turner. "They offended her, likely. Well, we'll let her see what we can do, some of ye."

"She don't run fast; but it's a bit of honour to drive her Majesty," replied Eldred. "And I wish me and my *Polyphemus* would get the turn."

"Your missus will be jealous o' your other Polly," remarked a shunting engine-man.

"Not she; she ain't such a fool," replied Eldred.

"Some faymales is all that, and over," said the shunting-man. "Bill Nathan's wife was mad with him when she found him for ever on his ingen, and declared she would up and go home to her mother; she said she wouldn't go to Nathan's house until he knocked off spending his time in the running-sheds when off duty."

"Well, she had a spirit. A man's no call to sit about when he's not on duty. He should go home."

"But she used to jeer at him acause he was dirty and black when he came home, and she called him a chimney-cleaner. So one day a mate o' Bill's tells her as her husband was sittin' up in the shed with *Adelaide*, and there was a 'muss!' Bill got it warm, but she got so laughed at for her jealousy that she took to her bed, and died for spite. She did!"

This and other anecdotes helped to pass the time until Eldred was again due on the foot-plate. He found everything in order; the relief men had coaled and watered *Ceres*, and the cleaner had "touched her up," so she was ready to run her up trip again. As soon as the engine was detached from the train

Eldred joined it, and in five minutes *Ceres* was off once more.

Nothing occurred to affect even the superstitious Eldred. The evening was dark, it is true, but clear. The signals stood out well against the sky, already studded with stars in the zenith, the engine steamed as well as could be expected, and nothing occurred to annoy the friends of the foot-plate.

As they were approaching Wexthorpe again, Jack remarked—

“I wonder where your *genus* is now, Bob?”

“Somewhere where he oughtn’t to be. I wish I had him in my hands; I’d give him something to remember me by.”

Eldred said this as if he meant it, and as such a subject angered him, Jack wisely let it drop.

Five minutes were consumed with various cups of coffee and glasses of beer at Wexthorpe, and at 9.15 p.m. Eldred began his last stage but one. He had one stop between Wexthorpe and London, and that was all. Nothing was seen of the “evil genus” of the engine-driver, and *Ceres* started again with a clear ash-pan, which is the locomotive conscience.

* * * * *

That same evening a haggard, hunted-looking man, most miserable and melancholy, entered a public-house near the station for Applecombe. Nobody took particular notice of him, but as he quitted the house, somewhat unsteadily, the landlord remarked—

“If I was his ‘missus,’ I’d see him safe home. He’s not fit to be out this time o’ night.”

“Who is he, master?” asked a guest.

“Can’t say. I’ve seen him about—looks half-mad, out o’ sorts, out o’ luck!”

"Perhaps it's the man that's 'wanted!' Ha, ha!" And then the matter dropped.

But the stranger continued his way unnoticed. The night was dark, and his thoughts were in full harmony with it, for he was desperate. Hunted down, a forger and defaulter; a swindler and train-robber—all his crimes had come at last upon his head. He had suddenly failed. The "snap," the impudence, the cool courage, which had hitherto sustained him had given way, and then the strings which he had so long controlled relaxed. Without his firm grasp they had become entangled, his nervous fingers could no more part them, or work them properly. His plans, his schemes collapsed: he was found out—beggared, ruined, hunted!

He knew it must come sooner or later; but he had hoped for "later." We all do! We feel that our schemes may fail, our health and our money pass from us. Then our day of reckoning is approaching, and friends ignore us; then misfortune falls upon us, our failings, deprived of manners and means, are exposed. The glamour has passed away, and we stand confessed in our natural deformity—ridiculed, detested, avoided, even by those who professed love, regard, and friendship! It's only "the way of the world!"

Ay, he was now a fugitive. Certain transactions, which he had fancied secure, at any rate until his finances had been restored, and he could escape, were suddenly revealed, and his City course was run! In vain he had endeavoured to make terms. No one would compromise with him, and he had left London in imminent danger of arrest, even when he went down to "bring off" his last, mad *coup*.

Thus doomed to destruction—we know the proverb

about reckless folk—he failed, and since that night when the headless corpse of his accomplice had tumbled heavily upon him, he had wandered about the country haunting, in a fascinated manner, the railway, the scene of his last adventure, in the hope of something occurring, of some means whereby he could fly off and put himself out of reach of those who, near London, were anxiously looking for him, and those who expected him to leave the country.

That night, after he quitted the public-house, as related, he hid himself in a “fogger’s” shelter, but could not sleep. He rose again, and determined to track the railway until daylight, when he would endeavour to purchase some food, or beg it at some farmhouse, and wander on next evening. He had several hours of darkness at that time of year, and started before ten o’clock with some feeling of hope in his breast. He had already, for a few days, eluded his enemies, and why should he not escape altogether?

He started and made some progress. Several times he had to get out of the way of trains, and once he had a narrow escape; but he scrambled on—tired, hungry, half-fainting. The night was dark and gloomy, but he plodded on.

A noise behind him made him turn. A train! Stepping from the down to the up metals he let it go by, watching it in a half-stupor carelessly. It thundered past, unheeding him, and he followed on its own track to the curve where it had disappeared.

Whither was he going? He did not know. The cutting increased the darkness, the slight incline even added to his torture. Could he continue his way? Dazed, bleary-eyed, racked with pain, he heard yet

another train behind him. There was no light. Was he dreaming? The noise increased. He turned round. No head lamp, no black line of trucks, no gleam of fire from the engine! But it was approaching him! Invisible, it was roaring behind him in the cutting through which he had just passed. A phantom train! Was it possible that a train could be there and invisible to him? He heard it, high in the trees.

Certain that something threatened him, that some invisible agency was working against him, he stepped back to the "up" line, and waited the approach of the invisible train, which was so darkly pursuing him. He watched closely, stooping down to catch the glint of the fire. Yes, there it is before him! A bright light! The noise is plainer now. It is close! The other way! The other way! Ah!

He leaps up, gets one horrible dazzling sheet of flame in his face, and the next moment is . . . Where?

The echo of the approaching up train from the opposite bank had misled him. No phantom train this! The curve had hidden the head-light until it was close upon him, and Mr. Ricketts, the financier—some said "forger"—was hurried into eternity in a second, unprepared—*Ceres* his executioner!



RUN OVER! (*see p. 172*).

"Put on another lump or two, mate," suggested the driver to Jack, as the *Ceres* showed symptoms of flagging. "Why, my socks, the gauge is going back. Pile it in, mate, or we shan't reach Applecombe, let alone London."

Jack shovelled in the coal scientifically, so as to leave the fire hollow in the centre, and clear as possible. There is an art in "firing," remember; Jack knew this, and performed his task properly, but, nevertheless, the steam went down lower and lower, and there seemed every chance of *Ceres* coming to a standstill.

"They've played some trick on us, Bob," said Jack, the fireman. "They relief men have settled us, I am afeard!"

Eldred made no reply; he had to find out the cause, if he could, and then he had to remedy it. The tubes were all right, and the fire-box—no waste or leakage anywhere, and the fire seemed right; but there *was* something down in the ash-pan. That he could discern from the outside by peering down, and he immediately returned to the foot-plate.

"It's the animal we run over," he said. "It's in the ash-pan. We'll have it out at Applecombe if we can reach it."

With considerable difficulty the engine managed to keep within a measurable distance of its time; and, as soon as the train drew up, Eldred dived underneath, and pulled out the bust of a man so terribly disfigured as to be unrecognisable if one side of the face had not afforded a clue; but Eldred had little doubt that the unfortunate victim of *Ceres* was Mr. Ricketts, the too venturesome financier!

This impression was confirmed next day, when the newspapers announced the death and pre-

sumable suicide of a gentleman who had traded under the name of "Ricketts," and who was "wanted" by the police for forgery. His real name the editors mercifully suppressed, and we will not withdraw the veil which for so many years has shrouded the identity of the dead man from the public ken.

"Well, Jack, didn't I say as he were my evil genus? Bad as he was in life, he nearly did for us in his last moments! Anyhow, he's dead now, and he can't hurt us any more," said Eldred as the train neared London again.

"Unless his ghost rides a trip," replied Jack, laughing, "and I shouldn't be surprised, nor wouldn't care much. The 'governor' couldn't fine us for havin' a ghost on the foot-plate, anyhow!"

"Well, we don't want any ghosts on the foot-plate," replied Eldred. "There's Molly, look!" he cried, as the train, slackening speed, passed his own house. "She's in the upper room. No, that isn't her; that woman had a baby in her arms; and—why, never! It must be my baby!"

"Didn't ye expect it, mate?" asked Jack.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Eldred again. "I wish I could have had another look in. But I say, Jack, suppose they saw we hadn't old 'Polly' this trip: the missus will be nervous. She's done it, mate, she's done it! The 'evil *genus*' is dead, you may depend! Well, that's clever too, when I wasn't there!"

Eldred was delighted at the prospect which his imaginative and sanguine temperament, now released from its incubus of Ricketts, opened up to him. A son! a daughter! What should he call him? Polyphemus of course! No name better; and if a girl,

she should be Polly, and no more. This important matter was fully settled in the engine-driver's mind before he started to the shed to "sign off" that night.

He was in a state of considerable excitement, and when he wrote his name as having come off duty, he, in his confusion, penned the name Polyphemus Eldred.

Then, glancing at the list for the morning, he hurried home, and was soon introduced to his son and heir.

"Polyphemus is his name, Molly, lass. Thou'lt see him a fine fellow, takin' after his father: thou shalt. Ay, Polyphemus will be it as I am a sinner." And, strange to relate, Polyphemus it was, notwithstanding the amendment suggested by the curate, who objected to "heathen and mythical titles."

"Then thou shalt not christen him at all," replied Eldred to the objector. "He'll be called Polyphemus in the chapel, likely." So it came to pass that a compromise was arrived at. His first name was John, and Polyphemus fell behind out of sight of the general public.

Eldred's "evil genus" was now certainly defunct, and prosperity seemed inclined to smile on him. Mr. Cannon was as good as his word. In a few months Robert was promoted, and one night he came home full of good news. He was a first-class driver. No longer short passenger trains troubled him. The ancient and fish-like "goods" were laid aside. *Polyphemus*, the engine, not the infant, was henceforth to be the "flyer" to compete with the marvellous efforts of the rival line, and run northwards, at seventy miles an hour.

"You'll have to put your best foot foremost, Eldred," said the chief. "We can't have those fellows

yonder getting ahead of us. They have shortened their time half an hour ; so have we, and next month we must run them down."

From this time commenced the now celebrated competition, in which our engine-driver took part. Fortunately the race did not last very long, or the wear and tear of mortals, as well as of machines and metals, would have told heavily, or led to accidents perhaps.

There would be no necessity to mention this wonderful and historical race on the railway had not *Polyphemus* and his masters on one of these occasions met with a little adventure which is worth recording, as illustrating the narrow margin of safety which is at times present in running an express train. The circumstances are as follows :—

Some ten minutes before ten one fine morning Eldred and his trusty companion backed the engine down to the short train, which was then ready to convey its passengers northwards. There were about one hundred and fifty passengers, with luggage, and the whole train weighed over one hundred tons. Eldred had to take this "flyer" as far as Bounstal, and he was timed to run the one hundred and twenty miles in two hours and twenty minutes, or at a speed of over fifty miles an hour, including stoppages, starting, and pulling up. He had two stoppages *en route*.

A record of his journey may be interesting. The *Polyphemus* started at one minute after ten a.m., and, notwithstanding certain inclines which it had to overcome, it performed the first fifty miles in the hour, and actually ran over its time for that section. After quitting Hurnford the average pace was sixty miles an hour, varying between fifty-eight and sixty-three miles per hour. The hundred and twenty miles were

actually run in one hundred and thirty minutes—a splendid record with eight loaded coaches.

But when the *Polyphemus* had reached Bounstal rather before than after time, and just as Jack, the fireman, was about to uncouple the engine, the station-master came up and ordered Eldred to proceed fifty miles farther, as the engine which had been selected to perform the next section had displayed a cracked tire, and another steed had been telegraphed for to be ready at Unterwall, fifty miles ahead. So there was nothing for it but to obey.

"We'll have cut it fine to get back in time then," said Eldred. "Fifty miles and back means a couple o' hours extra runnin'."

"You can manage that, surely?" remarked the station-master.

"Yes, we can manage it; but its work all on end from nine till seven o'clock to-night—no time for dinner either, nor perhaps no tea."

"Well, *I* can't help it; I'm very sorry. You must go, and you may rest here after. You can perhaps arrange for the five o'clock, instead of the three-thirty as named."

So Eldred and his steed, the sturdy *Polyphemus*, rushed away, and in due time handed the train over to a compound locomotive at Unterwall platform greatly to the driver's satisfaction.

"Now Jack, a drop o' water, a few lumps of coal, and we'll get back to Bounstal in a second. There's that big bank to climb up by Shortness, but I think we can run it, as the line's clear!"

Jack assented: the *Polyphemus* was run on the siding and left there awhile. The driver and his mate got off for a few minutes before starting on their rapid run, "light."

"You mind that ingin, you young imp," shouted Jack to a lad employed in the office. "Don't you get up playin' tricks there."

"Who's playin' tricks? Think I never see an ingin afore?" replied the lad, who was standing on the step. He got off it, however, and the engine-men proceeded to the cabin to warm their tea in their cans, and to eat a bit of dinner. Ten minutes would suffice for this, while the young cleaners "looked round" the engine, and the relief men supplied its wants.

These matters were soon arranged. The relief men put the engine back on the siding, and the coast being clear the pointsman opened the switches for the main up line. Only a passenger train had gone up since *Polyphemus* had come in, and it travelled well, so Eldred hoped to reach Bounstal in an hour easily.

He did not hurry, for the railway paradox occurred to him: If I leave here rather later, I shall reach Bounstal all the earlier, thereby arguing that he would not be checked by signal a mile or two outside his destination, and thus he could actually arrive more quickly.

So Eldred and his mate did not hurry themselves, but, just as they emerged from the cabin, smoking, and looking about, they perceived an engine, which was very much like *Polyphemus*, moving over the points. The name was not distinguishable as the locomotive passed, and was immediately hidden behind some empty carriages.

"What's up, Jack!" exclaimed Eldred. "Strikes me that was *Polyphemus* comin' over."

"Looked like her," replied Jack. "Come along. Mind that ingin, Bob."

An engine just then was moving out to the siding. The driver whistled to Eldred and his mate, but they did not stop to parley ; they hurried along.

When they reached the siding near the box it was empty !

"Hullo, pointsman, where's my ingen?" shouted Eldred.

"What's your ingen? I never see you afore—what's it?"

"What's it! Why, *Polyphemus*. She was here ten minutes ago. Come in with the flyer. Where's she?"

"Blessed if I know then," replied the man. "Dicky Sharpe was on her, maybe. He's away now."

"Are the points open?" asked Eldred. "If so, she's gone off by herself with that child, and there'll be murder! Where's your foreman?"

"Here he is ; he's in a put-out, too, I can see," said the pointsman.

"Hi, you!" roared the official. "Who sent that engine up the line just now—*Polyphemus*? She's off by herself. Running away! You, Bird, here: get out on the up line and follow her up—that's safest. Look alive! You're her chaps, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Eldred. "We came to find her. We'll run down with these mates, and try to overtake her. That child will never stop her."

"Right away then: are the points clear?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man.

"Then off with you ; I'll telegraph on and have the road cleared. Mind you catch her before she pitches into the up passengers. Run!"

Bird and his companions needed no admonition. Fortunately, the engine was in steam ready for piloting, if required ; and Bird was an experienced driver.

He did not know Eldred, who had not run that section since he was on the "goods" traffic ; and men change.

"Fire away, my lad!" said Eldred. "The *Polyphemus* can travel, the' may be sure."

"So can the *Lion*," replied Philip Bird, "and she'll pick up your ingin pretty smart."

"That's good!" was Jack's comment. Eldred made no reply: he was too anxious.

A pause ensued. The *Lion* ran out rapidly and mounted the curve faster and faster, roaring through a tunnel, growling over a bridge, and snarling at a paling alongside, but no glimpse of the *Polyphemus* could the pursuers get.

"Thee'll have to do it a bit quicker, mate," said Eldred to the driver. "She's got a long start!"

Bird opened the regulator a little more, and in a moment the pace became tremendous. The somewhat small driving-wheels revolved with fearful rapidity: the eye could not follow the rapid revolutions, nor could the ear distinguish the separate beats of the exhaust.

Fast along the level, rushing at headlong speed through the cutting, bringing small showers of chalk down behind her, the *Lion* swept on. Then with sloping, diminishing banks, topped with fading hedges and autumn-tinted trees at intervals, furrowed land, pasture, common, succeeded each other at a terrible pace. No sooner had a cottage come in sight than it was passed—then a road!

"Shut off! shut off!" shouted Jack. "The level crossing gates are open. Something is coming. Who opened the gates?"

Bird never touched the regulator: he knew it was no use to check the engine. Instead of stopping he

rushed on, whistling loudly and sharply, in *staccato* notes, to direct the attention of those at the gate to their danger.

A cart and horse were stopped just inside the gate on the down line; but the animal was sulky, and refused to back. In vain the carter pushed and encouraged the brute; it would not move, and the man, seeing his danger, ran behind the cart for safety.

Roaring and shrieking the *Lion* came on, and dashed completely through the gates. One was splintered into matchwood, and the fragments seriously injured the unfortunate horse, which immediately rushed forward at a headlong pace, bleeding from the gashes caused by the splinters which had struck him in several places. But he sustained no other injuries; the engine was half a mile away by the time the carter had cleared the metals in pursuit, and the woman at the crossing was in a terrible fright.

The *Lion* sustained no injury. She continued her headlong run, and, after three minutes of really alarming speed, came in sight of the runaway, just rising the hill opposite.

"We must catch her on the incline!" shouted Bird. "If she gets over the bank she'll run off altogether. Hold hard!"

Then began a run which has never had its parallel in the annals of engine-driving. The *Polyphemus* had nearly a mile start then, but was slackening visibly on the bank. This ascent is one in one hundred and fifty for a short distance; then one in two hundred to the top, when the line falls for two miles at one in two hundred.

Beyond the steep decline is a large station, a busy junction, where engines and trains are always passing to and fro, crossing and re-crossing and shunting.

If this place had not already received and acted upon the warning a dreadful accident must surely happen, for a parliamentary train started thence after the faster passenger train.

The occupants of the *Lion* could not yet perceive the distance signal, and they did not dare to slacken speed. If *Polyphemus* passed the summit first, or not under control, no human agency could stop her. The pointsman would not turn her into a siding because the lad was on the engine, but the station-master might have her slewed round on the loop line, and thus avoid the points of the "main" metals.

These thoughts occupied the silent quartet of engine-men on the *Lion*, which was tearing madly along in pursuit up the hill.

"Look out!" cried Eldred, "we shall do it. Steady, mate, she's overhauling fast."

As he spoke, one driver slung himself off the foot-plate, and clinging desperately to the hand-rail, stood on the framing in front, awaiting the moment when the buffers would touch the tender of the *Polyphemus*.

Driver Bird knew his business. He ran up cautiously, but had little time to spare; the lad on the *Polyphemus*, of course, saw them, and was making frantic attempts to stop; but he could not shut the regulator. It was very stiff, and he could not close it, or reverse the gear. But he had in some slight degree checked the monster with the hand-brake; and this pressure told going up-hill.

A bump, a slight rebound, another touch, and the engine and tender ran buffer to buffer. In a moment, Eldred had leaped over, and gained the foot-plate over the coals, narrowly escaping death by coming in contact with the bridge, under which the engines were just then passing. But the summit was yet

ahead ; the steam was shut off, the boy kicked aside, and the "monster Polypheme" was brought up "as quiet as a lamb" in front of the hardy *Lion* in the junction sidings.

There all had been prepared. The down line had been cleared, and an engine was already in movement in order to "collar" the runaway as it passed. But when the engines were seen coming along amiably together, the officials knew that all danger was over ; and the *Lion*, after a draught of water, was sent back amid many congratulations and expressions of wonderment and goodwill.

Nor was Eldred forgotten. This second brave act of his became talked about, and the directors were pleased at their next meeting to compliment him upon his bravery and pluck in dangerous circumstances. They specially noted him for promotion, and Mr. Cannon personally congratulated him.

"If you live, you will do well, Eldred ; but if you go racing runaway engines, you won't live long. However, you behaved well, and we'll look after you on the next opportunity."

The driver of the *Lion* and his fireman were promoted with Jack, who was put to drive soon after ; and he just missed the turn he wished to run—the charge of the Queen's train. This was a great disappointment for him, but the honour of driving Her Gracious Majesty was reserved for Robert Eldred himself, and *Polyphemus* was the engine selected when the time came.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NEW DEPARTURE—THE STRIKE SUGGESTED—
BOB ELDRED IS FIRM, AND “TAKES IT FIGHTING.”

WE must pass over some weeks in the life of our locomotive, during which *Polyphemus* behaved in a most exemplary manner, and Eldred incurred no danger. His adventures during his first spell of “fast passenger” driving and express running had made him a somewhat noteworthy individual, and after a year or so from the time when we first encountered him he could not complain of any want of notice from his passengers.

Polyphemus was a well-known engine, and fitted with some of the latest improvements, such as a “plunger oil-feed,” which lubricated the slide-bars while running, without the necessity for the driver to leave the foot-plate; and the adoption by the Store Department of a new lubricant, very speedily brought the engine to “concert pitch.”

In these arrangements Eldred had something to advance; and an engine-man who is fond of his business will always be listened to by an engineer who has his profession truly at heart. By such men (Mr. Adams of our South Western Railway, for instance) the profession is honoured, and improvements in the locomotive are continually being made. In fact, the express engines of this line are, at present, the finest machines running.

Eldred, his wife, and Polyphemus junior, continued to live in their small lodgings looking upon the

railway ; but the first occupants of the other rooms had departed, and an engineer—a smart young fellow—had come in their place. He was an energetic, anxious, but practical man, and by continual representations had induced the Company to consider certain suggestions made by him. He enlisted Eldred on his side, but many an argument they had in the garden before the latter could be fully convinced.

“Then the *Lion* is in dock again. I told ye so. Your *Polyphemus* will go to grief soon if ye use such oils as we do. You’ll see!”

“It will last our time,” replied Eldred.

“Ay, there’s your regular ‘sit down and wait’ answer. It’s the same in the departments here. Look at the stores ; saving and pinching to show economy in the report, and crippling the engines.”

“Crippling the ingins! What do you mean?” cried Eldred. “What do *you* know about it?”

“I mean that our people are saving on one hand, and squandering on the other. I see it. Don’t you know why the *Ceres* gave out in the cylinders?”

“They wore out,” replied Eldred.

“Wore out! Yes, the acids generated from inferior oil wore them out—not working didn’t. If you can get our stores to issue a proper kind of lubricant you won’t find the same wear and tear.”

So these men put their heads together, and after awhile—for things are not done at express speed—a really excellent lubricant was found, which the engineer pronounced “Perfection,” and as such it was generally known.

By taking such interest in these and other practical matters, Eldred and his new acquaintance, Baker, after a while began to be regarded as good men—men with

their souls in their work ; men who intended to rise, and also did not regard their occupation solely from a monetary standpoint—as the medium of employment simply, but from a higher point of view.

This feeling of being appreciated gave each man a self-respect and a confidence in himself, not always attained by the careless worker. These friends did not think or believe that the end and aim of engine-driving had been attained when they could run a train to time and avoid any accidents arising from carelessness. Baker was a man who had ambitions, and he aimed at being promoted. He studied, and never said his work was done, or that he “knew all about an engine,” for that is a summit of knowledge attained by few. The possibilities of improvement are always being sought out by a true locomotive engineer : witness the many developments of our great men—our railway men, I mean—on our trunk lines.

The engine-driver, or anyone, who wishes to rise in his calling must study, and not simply be content to vegetate in it, and exist without any aims or wish for improvement.

This intimacy of Baker's was of great benefit to Eldred, and the men became chums, though the latter at times was surprised at the restlessness of his friend or “mate.” On one occasion Eldred had remarked this to Baker, and the younger man had refused any information as to his movements, but in such a confused way that Bob immediately suspected him of some designs.

Was it possible that he had been duped by some clever charlatan, who had come primed with his “Perfection,” or the latest oils ; the hints let fall by others adopted to his own views, or to the known tastes of the superintendent ? Was he, Eldred, again

to be made a catspaw? and, when he had pulled the chestnuts out of the fire, would this young man, with his superior air and appearance, step up over the older driver's shoulders, and kick him down?

Eldred mentioned his suspicions to his wife, and received some consolation.

"I daresay he'll make a fool of ye, Bob! But never mind; your conscience is clear. You've made all these stir-ups with the best intentions, and mean well—if he don't."

"Ay, lass; but it's the good intentions and the mean-wells as do the mischief! If I thought as this chap was playin' on me I'd throttle him. What does he out of night, and go denyin' of it?"

Nevertheless Baker appeared quite unconscious of having in any way annoyed his "chum," and as he for a while restrained his propensity for midnight rambling, Eldred's suspicions were, if not entirely allayed, at least less active.

But one evening he returned with sombre brow and anxious. His wife, who was trying to lay the tea-table and send Polyphemus junior to sleep at the same time, at once perceived that something was wrong.

"Well, Bob, what is it?"

"What's what?" asked Eldred, gazing at the tea-table.

"What's the matter?" she asked quietly.

"Matter! Who says aught's the matter? What put that in thy head?"

"You, my man. Any more disputing of oils and what d'ye call ems—*lubriments*, is it?"

"Lubricatin' oils? No; but it'll have to be settled soon. There's nothing the matter so far."

"Well, then, wash your hands and face, and have

your tea like a Christian ; and don't look as black as thunder. Then you may kiss baby !”

“Thank ye, missus ; much obliged ! Any more orders, mum ?”

“Yes ; don't be sulky, Bob dear—you silly old fellow ! There, baby's asleep ; run off, and we will have tea cosy. Quick, you express man !”

“Blessed if the' ain't the driver and me the machine,” muttered Bob, admiringly.

“No, dear,” she replied, kissing him after a pretended search for a clean spot on his now smiling face ; “I'm only the ‘regulator,’ Bob. Run away, and get cleaned up.”

Bob Eldred, with a longing eye upon the fresh water-cress and simmering tea-pot, strode heavily upstairs, and in a few moments returned “more like a Christian,” as his better half remarked. He attacked the “creases” with avidity, and drank scalding tea without winking ; thick bread and butter also rapidly disappeared, and if all “Christians” were to eat as heartily as Bob the world would be soon a desert.

His gloom had disappeared. Some wifely tact and personal attention had tamed the irritable driver.

“Now, Bob, what put you out ? Tell me all about it. Is it Baker again, dear ?”

“Ay, he's in it ! There's talk of a strike, Molly. The fellows outside are tryin' to get us to say we're dissatisfied with our wages and hours, and Baker's one of the gang in disguise. He's really an engineer, but has only come on here to stir up strife and agitate.”

“I'd agitate him if I had him here ! He and his oils and lubrications ! I'd pack him off. He's a good bit *too* oily !”

"Oh, his lubricants are right enough; but he's discontentin' the men. They're all right enough when let alone."

"What will you do, Bob?"

"I'll remain as I am. There's no strike yet."

"But if the others strike, you won't, will you?"

"They'll make me, lass."

"Make ye! *Make* ye give up your work! I thought these strike people said 'Freedom' is their watch-word?"

"So they do—until anyone goes agen them! Then it's 'coercion'—and no mistake!"

"If I were you, Robert, I wouldn't go out if it comes to it. Why should you?"

"Then they'll picket me and assault me; try to kill me on the engine, most like!"

"But the law will protect us, Bob—won't it?"

"The law! Precious little the law will do unless it's paid for it! You don't catch the law defendin' men agen the strikers in a hurry, unless it sees its way to fees!"

"Then you will have to remain idle, and give up work because Baker says so. What will he do when *he* strikes? It's some consolation that he will suffer, too, with the rest."

"Him! Ha, ha, Molly! the' don't know the rogues! D'ye suppose Baker and his kind *ever* suffer? They're paid pounds a-week to agitate, and drive about in hansoms, and talk, spout, and set people by the ears! If they warn't paid well there'd be no strikes like this! When a man's badly paid he should strike or appeal; but when we're comfortable, it's folly! Everyone isn't made the same, and can't have everything the same."

"Then you won't go out?" asked his wife.

"Not if I can help it. I'll stick to the road. It's been my livin', and I've no complaints."

This conversation had a great effect upon Mrs. Eldred. She foresaw trouble ahead, and wondered whether Robert would remain firm. She had heard of the results of some strikes, and had in a way sympathised with the men who were working for very small pay. She felt that no company or individual had any right to pay the shareholders at the expense of the men; that labour had its price, and should not be paid starvation wages. With these ideas her husband properly agreed: but where no man complained; when all were quite contented and well, and regularly, paid; a pension fund provided, and many perquisites given for good services, Bob felt it was a monstrous act to undermine the confidence existing between employers and employed, and a distinctly unfair thing for a man to accept wages and turn against his employer in secret when no grievance existed.

Other people, unfortunately, had other opinions; and the strike agitation went on. Much discussion ensued: the directors yielded some points, but one they found it impossible to yield immediately—viz., limited hours. They gave notice to quit to those who did not choose to remain on their terms. Many remained gladly, and Bob Eldred amongst them; but a large number seceded, and other men were employed.

Then the passions of the animal were let loose: "Live and let live" went to the wall. The boasted "liberty" took the further liberty to stone the orderly and law-abiding; the agitators took care to be absent. Baker ran away and wrote fiery addresses, but did not put in an appearance. So the usual features of strikes continued, and Eldred found himself denounced.

"Oh, Bob, give it up!" cried his wife, when he came in one evening spattered with mud and bruised by stones. "They'll kill you, the cowards!"

"Poor fools!" replied Eldred. "Silly sheep! The precious shepherd has bolted and left the idiots to starve! Just like him! I'd hang that Baker. He's caused two or three deaths already!"

"Oh, Robert!" exclaimed Mrs. Eldred.

"It's true: the men have run a 'goods' off the road, and the brakesman's killed. The engine-men are hurt, and a child at the Belham crossing was crushed! All this mornin' early! Isn't that murder? They'd kill *me* if they could. But they won't."

"You'd better not go out with *Polyphemus* again, dear," she said, persuasively.

"Won't I! Take thy oath I *will*! A set o' curs who's afeard to come and fight fair! As for Baker, I'd brand him if I had him here—the mischief-maker!"

A few days passed, and still Eldred, on his well-known engine, did his duty; he was contented with his position, and disputed any man's right to interfere with him in his work. He interfered with no one: let others leave him alone. That was all he bargained for.

He was decidedly a favourite, and even the ill-disposed respected his pluck. Though he had been pelted, as stated, no one had come near him to offer personal violence, and in all probability Eldred would have influenced many to return had not the oily agitator, the really clever engineer, returned to the district from some other locality where his peculiar talents were apparently in demand.

Baker was quite aware of Eldred's boldness and firmness. He knew how determined he was, and that

his example was really influencing the strikers, several of whom, in view of cold hearths and starving wives and children, were disposed to accept the pay and shorter hours offered. But Baker and Co. demanded the pound of flesh, and no less would satisfy them.

"Better give in!" shouted Baker. "We can't have blacklegs here! If you were men you'd soon put these fellows down! Crush them—not illegally—smash them; morally, of course. Don't attack them on the line, don't do the permanent way any injury, and try not to tamper with the bridges. *I hear some of them are not safe.* I am sorry for the engine-men and the passengers; if any accident *does* happen it will be the fault of the Company for not having them seen to, mind that. A mean Company it is, too."

Loud groans interrupted the speaker. He smiled. He knew that the groans were for the Company, not himself; and he could see that his address had not been lost on his audience. The trains were no longer safe. His point was gained.

"Better mind yourself, man!" he said to Eldred afterwards in the street. "The men are getting desperate, and won't hesitate at trifles. The trains may be wrecked! I've warned you!"

"And I'll warn thee, my man," retorted Eldred. "If any accident happens to my train—if anyone is injured by thy curs—I'll leave the Company's employment——"

"Oh, so we've got you at last, have we!" cried Baker; "afraid are you?"

"No. I'll leave the Company, and hunt thee through the world; and when I've found thee I'll kill thee like a dog! Thou'st ruined hundreds of honest

men, hast wrecked hundreds of homes, and starved hundreds, while thy paid agitations is goin' on : poor fools, to listen to such tin-pots as thee ! Dost hear ! I'll hunt thee down, and throttle thee with my own hands—if I live !”

“ Ay,” replied Baker, “ *if ye live !* Depend ye'll die first. You defy me then ! Mind yourself in future ! It's your own fault. I've done my best.”

“ Thou hound ! Skulking cur ! Get out o' my way !”

Eldred pushed the agitator aside, but he was no coward, and returned a stout blow. In the encounter which succeeded Eldred had certainly not the best of the battle, and he returned home more infuriated than ever against James Baker, his former “ chum.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FEARFUL WARNING—MRS. ELDRED DOES HER DUTY—POLYPHEMUS AGAIN IN DANGER.

“ YOU'RE always ‘in the wars,’ Bob,” remarked Mrs. Eldred ; “ and you'll get hurt some day. Who is it this time ?”

“ Baker ! He and me had a bit of a wrangle. I told him I'd tackle him if aught happened to my train, and so I will !”

“ But will anything happen, Bob ?” she cried, anxiously.

“ Can't say : seems like it. He's puttin' the fellows up to it, I hear ; but I'll settle *him !*”

Mrs. Eldred was greatly distressed at this news.

She had hitherto been averse to her husband giving in to the strikers, but now the time had come when, in her mind, he ought to retire from engine-driving, for his own sake, until, at any rate, the malcontents had been dealt with by the law.

"It isn't as if Robert objects to striking if it's in a proper cause, Mrs. Fitt," said Mary to her neighbour; "it's the interference he can't abide when we's all content."

"That's what I tell my Tim," replied the lady next door. "He's been out for a full fortnight, and has just money enough to spend in drink from the Union. I hardly ever see a penny of it. It's cruel, so it is!"

"It is so," responded Mrs. Eldred; and after some further conversation the neighbours separated.

Mr. Timothy Fitt came home that evening in a pleasantly (?) muddled condition.

"S' Eldred's out?" he asked his wife, shortly.

"Bob Eldred's workin' for his wife and child, like a *man*—not besottin' himself like a *beast*!" was Mrs. Fitt's somewhat personal reply.

"Ah! Well, I'm goin' work to-night, so don't sit up: I'm goin' business. Gimme some tea!"

"There's no tea; there's no bread in the house, either. You've made that scarce."

"Then I'll have some beer. Good ni': don't wait up. Got work!"

"Where in the name of goodness would anyone give *you* work?" asked Mrs. Fitt, with much scorn.

"At the bridge—most important job to-night. Never mind. Ask Baker: he knows, daresay. No harm, o' course! Oh, *no*! Ta, ta!"

With this farewell Mr. Tim Fitt rolled out, and betook himself to the public-house, leaving his wife

and two children to manage as best they could during his absence.

"Now I daresay he's up to some mischief!" murmured Mrs. Fitt; "and he made some inquiry concernin' Bob Eldred! Bridge! What bridge wants mendin' to-night? and if it does who would send *him* to mend it in his state? I'll just see Molly Eldred about this."

So Mrs. Fitt came to her back door, and, leaning in a familiar manner on the low palings which separated the yards, shouted for Mrs. Eldred.

Molly, thinking that something was wrong, came out as soon as possible, her babe in her arms.

"What is it?" she asked. "I was in the middle of my tea."

"Ah, you're lucky! Not a drop of tea has passed my lips since Tuesday—and here's Friday!"

"Come round then and have some," asked Mrs. Eldred, hospitably.

"The children can't be left," wavered Mrs. Fitt.

"Bring them in too, poor things. You sit with me until Bob comes home. Where's your good man? Where's Bains?"

"Good man? Don't talk of *him*! He's up at the 'Moon' again. Ever since this strike it's 'Moon,' 'Moon,' all day: drinking mostly. But I've somethin' to say to you, and I'll come in."

In ten minutes the unfortunate Mrs. Fitt came round by the front way with her two children, aged one year and four years respectively.

"Annie will mind the babies while we have our tea," said she, cheerfully. "Now, Annie, sit there, and mind them two."

The child being at the same time regaled with a couple of slices of bread and butter, undertook the

THE BIOGRAPHY OF A LOCOMOTIVE.

acquitted herself admirably, in the
astonishes well-to-do parents, who
wonder how such young children are en-
dowed with the care of babies!"

"Where's Mr. Eldred to-day?" inquired Mrs. Fitt, in the full enjoyment of tea and unlimited sugar.

"On the long run: Bounstal to-day; he may be anywhere to-morrow," replied Mrs. Eldred. "It's here and there—no certainty; and I am miserable about him, I can tell ye."

"What time will he be home to-night?"

"Not until near midnight," replied his wife, with a sigh. "I'm on thorns for fear they will wreck him, and the bridges ain't safe! There's some girders weak, I'm told."

"That's true. My good-for-nothin' has gone to mend one this evenin', so he says!"

"Which is that?" asked Mrs. Eldred in alarm.

"I don't know. But it can't be much of a job or they wouldn't choose him to go with the gang; and he wasn't altogether right when he went off."

"Robert's comin' up with the fast train at eleven: he won't be home until after midnight. I wish all this strikin' was finished. I'm on thorns all day until he comes home!"

"Ah! the strikers will be sorry for it! Me and the children are a'most starvin', and what does Tim care? What does the leaders care? Not a button!"

Evening came in sadly, and about eight o'clock Mrs. Fitt took her leave, and returned with her children.

Mrs. Eldred, left alone, began to conjure up all kinds of fancies. Suppose this or that should happen,

what could she do? She was aware of the animosity which many of the strikers cherished against her husband, though she knew that many others secretly sympathised with him, but did not dare to express their feelings. So she endeavoured to console herself with the reflection that the majority would not harm him; but she was, nevertheless, extremely anxious.

Nine o'clock. The house was perfectly still; baby was blissfully asleep. Now and again the hardly noticed roar and rush of a passing train would harrow up the silence outside, and the whistles of impatient locomotives pierce the air. But at times there was silence for a few moments, pauses in the hurricane of railway business, which appeared more complete in comparison with the occasional uproar, for trains were few and far between.

It was during one of these pauses, when the ticking of the clock and the crackling of the fire were so uncomfortably in evidence, that Mrs. Eldred heard a stealthy footstep approaching the back door. The intruder—whoever the person was—must have come either from the railway, or over a neighbouring wall.

Sitting with her parlour door open, the sound was quite audible. The crunching of the gravel beneath cautiously treading heavy boots could not be mistaken. Who would thus approach the premises? A striker bent on mischief, perhaps!

Timid as Mrs. Eldred was by nature in general, she was possessed of great courage in emergencies. She felt that the safety of the house depended on her, and that, in her husband's absence, it behoved her to defend it, herself, and, above all, baby! So she threw the front door open as a preliminary avenue of

escape or assistance, and walked, rather fearfully, to the back door.

Somebody or something was trying to get underneath it.

"Who's there?" asked Mrs. Eldred, boldly. "Who are you—what do you want?"

"Hist! take it," whispered a strange voice; "it's under the door. I was afraid you wouldn't hear it, and I daren't come to the front."

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Eldred, who could not distinguish anything in the gloom.

"It's a note—a letter. Just read it; but don't tell who brought it."

"I don't know you. What have you come for? Who are you?"

"Never mind! I'm here, and underneath is your letter. I daren't be seen about here; so, good-night! Do as you like, only don't tell on me."

"I tell you I don't know you," replied Mrs. Eldred, who was still searching for the paper. At length she clutched it; yet, before returning to her sitting-room, she opened the door at the back to see the messenger. But he had already disappeared in the darkness, had probably scaled the wall, and returned whence he came, unseen.

Mary Eldred could not obtain any clue to his appearance. She searched the dark corners of her "garden," and found nothing. Ding dong, ding dong! Half-past nine! Three hours more alone. The solitude was becoming unbearable.

She was all this time mechanically twisting the paper in her fingers. She had almost forgotten it in her contemplation of the hours of solitude, and in her search for the messenger. But a few moments after she hurried indoors, locked the back entrance

shut the front door, and returned to the sitting-room, in which baby lay peacefully sleeping in the silence.

The paper was somewhat crumpled by this time, and, as a preliminary to reading it, Mrs. Eldred smoothed it with her hand on the table. She felt little curiosity concerning it. Her mind was filled with thoughts for her husband, and until he appeared in safety—or, at any rate, until, standing at the back door, she could see the train and the gleam from the furnace thrown by *Polyphemus* on his master's face, and hear the well-known whistle—a private signal for herself—she could not be perfectly at her ease, particularly under the strange and mysterious circumstances.

An engine-driver's wife never knows when the sad intelligence may come, and some well-meaning, but perhaps brusque, messenger tell her the news of her widowhood! Luckily, Mrs. Eldred did not think of any accident, of which the news would have reached her by word of mouth very quickly.

She held the still creased paper to the lamp, and read the unsteady pencilled writing. At the very first glance she turned pale, and clutched at the table for support. "No! no! it cannot be—it would be too cruel, too fiendish! Yet the paper says so." It ran thus—

"Take care of Bob to-night: he drives late up train. The Branscombe Viaduct is undermined.

"WELL WISHER."

That was all. All! Take care of her husband! How was she to take care of him? What was she to do? Could anyone help her? She sank down in agony—and in the silence the clock struck ten!

Each stroke thumped at Mary Eldred's heart. She caught the arm of the chair to sustain herself—she was fainting: the room swam round her; she was deadly cold. Then she swayed—her head reeled—noises rushed through her brain—her ears tingled.

By a mighty effort she controlled herself, and stood rigidly upright on the floor—a wild glare in her eyes, a haggard expression on her features: she had aged ten years in half as many minutes. “Take care of Bob! Oh! Heaven help me! how *can* I assist him?” she muttered. The viaduct—seven long miles away—undermined for his destruction! How could she give an alarm?

She must act. She must do something—past ten o'clock. Her neighbours were early people; but even then she hardly dared to apply to them. Their husbands were, generally, out on strike: they would not dare to assist her. Mrs. Fitt might; but again, as her own husband was, no doubt, implicated, she might not. Mary Eldred recalled the words, “Mending the bridge.” No mending, this; destroying the viaduct—stopping the traffic—and the trains, if not warned, would be destroyed too! She sank into her chair again.

The trains? There were few trains! All the “goods” traffic had been, perforce, suspended. Only a few important passenger trains were run, and one of these—the only one that night—was driven by her husband. He was the victim selected: his life was aimed at! The passengers would be few, the train light, the risk small; and the destruction of the viaduct, the death of the obnoxious engine-driver, would be accomplished with the least possible amount of murder and violence.

These reflections occurred to the half-maddened wife as she sat staring vacantly before her, unmindful even of the sleeping babe beside her in his tiny cradle. The situation seemed so unreal: was it true—this well-meant, but horrible, warning? Was it not, rather, a trick to alarm her? Could it be possible that men, fellow-workmen, could be so cruel as to kill her husband, and other people, innocent even by the strikers' estimate, because he did not absolutely resign his manhood and self-respect into their hands?

But something must be done! The minutes were passing rapidly: every tick of the clock overhead meant so much less of life to her husband that night; and half-seconds become important when one measures one's existence by minutes. Was there no escape?

She, unaided, could do nothing. To act, she must have assistance; to get it she must leave the house—and the child! Hurriedly, and with feverish trembling hands, she tossed on a hat and jacket, turned down the lamp, settled the baby comfortably in the cradle, and quitted the room. All was still!

She had gained the door: she opened it, paused, and listened. Hark—a cry! The babe was calling her: he wanted food. Could she leave him? She did not know when she might return; and if she went back to warm his food and administer it, she might be too late to save her husband. Her heart beat wildly. The little wailing cry went to her heart. Poor baby! he was very hungry, and what mother can hear her child—her only child—cry for sustenance unmoved, unheeding?

She half turned: the babe was now wide awake,

and impatient. Her husband on the railway was speeding perhaps to death! The struggle was great, but the wife triumphed even over the mother! Shutting her ears to the sad and pitiful cry of her baby son, the wife hurried away to the railway sheds, where she expected to find some loyal men—a foreman or an inspector, too.

There were some in authority in the yard, and to them she appealed for help.

"Why, what's all this?" exclaimed a foreman. "Bob Eldred in danger—the viaduct? Nonsense! It's only a trick. No one could cut the viaduct in the time. Go home, Mrs. Eldred; we'll see to it in the morning."

"That will be too late!" she cried. "Send! oh, send someone; pray send! Can't anything be done?"

"It's half after ten," remarked an inspector, coolly. His manner seemed careless, but his mind was intent on action. "Who's in the ballast train, Bains?"

"No one yet, I expect," replied the foreman. "They don't go out for half an hour, if at all."

"Get them ready and send them out somehow. They can go down to the viaduct instead of to the branch line. Meantime, I will call Kenrick."

Kenrick was the station-master at the Branscombe station, and the inspector hurried to the loco' office to ring up Kenrick, and to tell him that he had better have the viaduct examined. Meantime, he must stop all traffic both ways. A ballast train would run down as soon as possible with a gang.

"All right, missis," said the foreman. "You go home: it's all right. No accident will happen to-night. Be quite easy in your mind."

"But my husband. Can't I go, too?"

"Oh, he will come home in time, of course. If all's right, we shall have him here about midnight; if not, he won't be back till to-morrow. We'll let you know if anything is wrong."

This was poor consolation, but she could get no other. She had done her best: the warning message was ringing in Branscombe office before she reached home, to find young Polyphemus nearly in convulsions.

But she had done her duty, she knew.

CHAPTER XIX.

PHIL BARTLEY'S "LITTLE GAME"—AN EXPLOSION —"INTO THE VALLEY OF DEATH."

ALL this while *Polyphemus* and his master had been vigilant and intent on their duty. Eldred and his fireman had kept a good look-out. They knew their lives were in danger: they expected picketing and intimidation in the streets if they quitted the Company's premises, and were by no means certain of non-interference even if they remained within the precincts of the terminus.

There were only two men in the cabin when Eldred and his mate, having looked over *Polyphemus*, and left him quiet in his stable, set out to warm their tea or supper. The men in the shed, with some others then absent, had remained true to the Company throughout, and consequently the engines were not

entirely deserted. The cleaners had seceded almost in a body, but other lads had volunteered, and so the small amount of locomotive polishing required had been performed in a way, but not in the usual manner.

"I suppose youringin's all right?" asked one man, as the driver seated himself near the fire. "I wouldn't leave her too long alone by herself."

"No, I'll just warm up here, and go back. Any news?"

"No; fellows still out. 'No surrender!' is their motto. If they could find some of us they would make it hot! I haven't been home for a week!"

"Dangerous, eh?" asked Eldred. "Perhaps I'd better go back to theingin. Some o' them may climb over, and do some damage. The' canst stay where you are, mate: I'll whistle if I want thee."

The fireman nodded his thanks, and sat down again, while the engine-driver returned to the shed. As the night was cold, he lay down on the foot-plate, and had the fire been drawn for any reason he might have got into the fire-box and slept comfortably until starting time.

But he could not permit his fire to go out completely, so, after seeing to the gauges, he lay down, as already stated, to enjoy a nap, and to protect his engine also. The gauge lamp was darkened; the glow from the furnace was not great; the shed was very dim and silent just then. The shadows of the engines which "had no work to do" were thrown on the ground, not heavily, and served only to increase the darkness, rendered visible by the feeble oil lamps.

The shed looked a grim and gruesome place that night, and the monotonous drip, drip, of water from

some leaking tap, or perhaps from the hose outside, was quite weird in the stillness and darkness.

But Eldred had no fears. His "evil genus" was dead, and he believed his good fortune would not desert him. He certainly had some misgivings concerning his return trip, but he would not dwell on them; when the time came he would meet them. He did not wish to "cross a bridge until he got to it." No use in anticipating evils.

In the dead silence he slept lightly. His body, somewhat fatigued, was glad of, and demanded, a rest; but the brain was alert, vigilant, and would not be coerced into unconsciousness. The house—the tenement—might appear to be shut up, uninhabited, but the occupant was awake, and the brain did not sleep.

Night set in; the lamps burned dimly; a chill air whistled through the shed. Some of the great swing doors had been closed, and the driver of *Polyphemus* would have shut himself in, had he thought of so doing. All was silence; but someone was moving, nevertheless.

There was something stirring in the gloom yonder, just outside the round-house, near where the darkness was accentuated by a black heap of ashes, in the shadow of the hut by the sidings. The figure of a man would have been seen, had anyone looked steadily in that direction; but, as no one was about, and the sheds were almost deserted, no one was likely to perceive him.

He crawled towards the engine as a wild Indian might do when approaching his enemy. He "stalked" the engine, and from a vantage ground of blackness studied it attentively. He had already peeped into the "cabin," and had seen, as he imagined, the driver

and his mate reposing calmly by the fire. The engine then was undefended, unprotected ; so much the better for the man, so much the worse for *Polyphemus*—the superior “animal” of the two.

Polyphemus was not ignorant of the man’s approach, we may assume ; but, if he were, he made no sign of annoyance, unless the dropping of a few ashes and a curious grumbling noise were indications of such a feeling

The man did not heed these little manifestations of temper. He continued his way more confidently, and, avoiding the foot-plate, climbed up the back of the tender, and carefully, amongst the coals, deposited some small canisters painted black, and, in the darkness, so like lumps of coal, being twisted and irregular in shape, and heavy too, that closer inspection than foot-plate emergency could give would be necessary to detect them at night.

This little business accomplished, the intruder again passed by the recumbent Eldred, but turned, paused, and came close to the foot-plate. Then, and not till then, he perceived the driver, who lay like a log, breathing heavily.

“Blackleg!” muttered the intruder, “next time you and your mate wants a quick run up, you’ll be a trifle surprised at your fire. That will give you beans, or I’m mistaken. Ugh! you vipers! Takin’ the bread out o’ honest men’s mouths! But you’ll have it—just wait, blackleg!”

The man shook his fist within an inch of Eldred’s face, and appeared to derive considerable satisfaction from the process. This solemn rite duly performed, with a repetition of the terms of opprobrium in hissing whispers, the man vanished into the darkness, and Eldred sat up.

"Blackleg!" he muttered. "Then I wasn't dreamin'. No; that was it, I'm sure! Someone's about. Let's have a peep! If anyone's about, it's for no good, and I'll make an example of him. Blackleg indeed! We shall see!"

Descending from his engine, after another hasty glance at the gauges, Eldred pursued the same tactics as his enemy: for the man was one of the leaders of the malcontents, and a principal agitator—not a speaker, for he was not paid. He had gone out with real convictions of the justice of his cause, and was not likely to stick at trifles to gain his ends. The worst of these strikers is they will not permit other men to exercise the same liberty that they claim for themselves.

Eldred dogged him. The sharp eyes of the master of *Polyphemus* distinguished the crouching form as it quitted the yard, stooping below the buffers of cold engines, and turning and winding to escape observation by any chance passer-by.

The man made thus indirectly for a small gate in the paling, by which at times admittance was gained by servants on duty. The man had a key, no doubt, and, once outside the yard, he could easily escape detection; but a gas-lamp burning just over the gate was bright enough to reveal his features and general appearance for a moment.

He was thin, wiry, dark in features, and wore a dirty red kerchief round his neck. His clothes were a suit of corduroy, and his cap was that of a sailor—a distinctive peaked cap, such as those sometimes worn by engineers nowadays.

"Phil Bartley, as I'm a sinner!" muttered Eldred, as he paused to watch the intruder. "Phil himself! Well, now what's he been up to? He must ha'

spared me ; but he's up to mischief. He's been at th' ingin ! He's been physickin' *Polyphemus* ! That's what he's been at—playin' blind hookey with the water, no doubt, to bring us up on a bank. Let's watch him !”

Eldred hurried on to the gate, opened it with his pass-key, and strolled behind Phil Bartley until he saw him safely housed at the “Goat and Bagpipes”—a strikers' house, with a remarkable sign of a large goat dancing on his hind legs, and playing the pipes vigorously all the while with intense gusto.

“He's safe there for a while,” muttered Eldred. “I've two hours yet nearly. We'll fix him up.”

The driver, having marked down his game, returned to the “cabin,” rather surprised at the absence of pickets, but he learned that they had been transferred to the “goods” sheds, whence some trains were intended to start. As his was the only passenger train remaining, and as his engine had been “attended to,” the malcontents had no fear from him.

When Eldred reached the cabin he ascertained that his fireman had gone to groom *Polyphemus*, and so he proceeded to the shed. There he found his mate, who had put in some coal, and was making ready to fill up the tender at the tank outside.

“Mind what thee's about, mate,” said Eldred. “A fellow was hanging round here just now. He may have doctored the ingin or played old Harry with the motion. Just cast your eyes over her, and I'll have a look when she's outside. I've spotted the customer, and will look after him. But wait a minute, I'll look round now,” he added, after a pause.

The driver put the engine in mid-gear, and then went underneath into the pit between the rails,

spanner in hand, and with a lamp examined the machinery.

"She's tight's a drum," he muttered. "No harm here. But he didn't come for nothin'. All right!" he said, as he climbed out. "But I'm puzzled, hanged if I ain't!"

At this juncture a foreman entered to look round, and Eldred told him of the incident in which Mr. Phil Bartley had played so conspicuous a part.

"Looks fishy!" said the official. "And you can't find anything?"

"No; machinery all right."

"He didn't tamper with the tender, and mix soda with the water, think you?"

"Couldn't; should have heard him."

"I tell you what I'll do," said the foreman, "I'll run down to the 'Goat,' and see if he's there. You can come if you like and identify him."

"Very well," replied Eldred. "Come along, mate. We may want ye as well."

So the three men, having put the engine safely in the siding, proceeded to the inn to identify Mr. Bartley.

"I promised Nat a lump o' coal," said the fireman; "so I'll take him a few, and go on later. Sha'n't be long."

"All right; we don't want you altogether," said the foreman. "You can remain in the cabin, if you like."

The young man was not sorry to stay behind, and so, when he had oiled the engine, he got a basket, and, putting a few lumps off the tender, he retraced his steps to the cabin, where Nat and a few "goods" drivers had assembled. Greetings passed, and the conversation turned on the strike and its prospects.

"There's one thing, anyway," remarked Nat as he replenished the fire, "the men are out, but for all their bluster you see they have not committed any violence. No ingen's off the road—no such damages—and it's the simplest thing in the world to derail a train."

"Not so easy," retorted a driver present. "I cut through a couple of sleepers one day, and they sent the train into the 'edge, and killed a few passengers; but we kept the rails ourselves—the ingen did!"

"Well, anyone can turn an ingen off the line with a 'cop' of cotton—a lump of cotton rolled on a spindle," said the other.

"Get out!" responded the driver, with contempt.

"Ye can. See here: get the cotton wound round, and just let ten yards or so lie on the rail, with the 'cop' (the bobbin) at the end. The engine will pick up the cotton and entangle itself, and when it comes to the 'cop,' which is rather elastic, it tips the engine off as nice as ninepins."

"Well, I'd rather not," said several. "Never heard o' that afore. Shovel on a bit more, Nat; it's plaguy cold this evenin'! I wonder how long the chaps will keep quiet?"

"Oh, they won't do no harm!" remarked another. "Just you see this: if they did, the police—Hollo!"

The sentence was never concluded. A bright flash of flame, a roar and a rush interrupted the speaker, who was blown bodily through the door, which was considerably blown out first for him to fall upon. The cabin roof collapsed, the chimney fell, and everyone underneath was seriously bruised, for the bricks and timbers fell in thickly. Nat was

greatly scorched, and others were blackened with the smoke and *débris*.

The explosion caused a great deal of confusion outside, and a crowd quickly collected round the gates and palings. The police entered immediately, and ascertained what no one questioned was the fact—that an explosive had been placed in the fire.

Yes; but “Who did it?” was the general inquiry, as the injured were taken to the hospital. Nat, the shed-man, was the most seriously hurt, as he was nearest to the fire, and some bruises and burns required attention. The only wonder was that someone had not been killed.

Eldred and the foreman heard the noise of the explosion, and hurried up with the people. They immediately obtained admission, and rendered assistance. Eldred’s fireman was fortunately unhurt, and he was enabled to give a clear account of the incident, which he did in a few words.

“Nat had jest put a few coals on, when ‘puff!’ the whole fire flew out, and Murnett was sent flying through the door! Out went the glass, up went the roof, and down come the chimney amongst us! A few bricks hit us, and the soot blacked us proper! Nat’s got a nasty burn, and Tom Luffon has his forehead gashed. Nearly all is bruised.”

“Where did the coal come from?” inquired the foreman, quickly.

“Why, off our tender, o’ course,” replied the fireman, Jack.

“Then, Mr. Phil Bartley, that’s your doing,” said the official, striking his palm energetically against his thigh. “Now I understand your little game. Eldred, you’ve had a narrow escape! The fellow you saw put the powder amongst your coals, and meant to

"Take care of thyself," replied Eldred, "and next time th' puts gunpowder on a man's engine, take care he isn't awake."

"What d'ye mean? I never——"

"Yes, the' did! Canisters like lumps—look out, ye cur. Ah, my lad, the's cotched it!"

As Bartley turned away, alarmed that his part in the explosion had become known, the foreman with a policeman appeared, and Mr. Phil Bartley was promptly given into custody and marched away to the police-station.

This was the last incident witnessed by Eldred and his mate that evening at Bounstal, for the train started almost immediately, and plunged into the cold blast, which met *Polyphemus* on the road, and almost made him shiver. But he bounded forward, conscious of his might, confident in his attendants, and unaware of any danger on the path of duty. "His not to reason why," any more than did Eldred or his mate. They had their duty to do; and they would do it, even if they rode "into the Valley of Death" on the way.

CHAPTER XX.

MALCONTENTS AT WORK—THE BREAKING OF THE VIADUCT—A NOBLE RESCUE, AND REWARD OF MERIT.

WHILE the events just described were taking place at Bounstal, Mrs. Eldred had not been idle, nor had the authorities at Branscombe been listless. The message despatched to the station-master had been

promptly acted upon, and, in company with some porters and constables, the agent made some quiet investigations.

"There can't be any harm done," he said to the booking-clerk, who also accompanied him ; "because the branch train has just passed over. So we shall find the chaps at work, I expect."

The party separated into two bodies : two constables accompanied each detachment of six, and each of these took a different route. One detachment, under the direction of the station-master, took its way along the line, the other proceeded from the station round by the road, so as to get underneath the viaduct, and prevent the escape of the miscreants, who were, no doubt, engaged in sawing the wooden struts, which thus almost severed would give way with the weight of the train passing above. The fate of all the passengers and the engine-men would be instantly sealed, for the viaduct was sixty feet high, and spanned a stream some ten yards wide—a rocky-bedded, brawling little river, almost hidden in places by the luxuriant foliage in summer and autumn, when the various tints were enchanting ; but in winter bare and somewhat wild—very lonely, too, in the short days. But in the summer the glen was filled with picnic parties, and the leafy woods resounded with merry laughter, or jealously concealed the whispering lover and his lass. Here came the artist and the excursionist alike, and found place for their pastime and repose.

Now, at night, the glen was black and lonely ; a chill wind rustled the few leaves, and sighed mournfully amid the bare boughs. The outlook was not agreeable ; but the men, bent upon discovery, went on.

Hardly a sound broke the stillness as they paused to listen. The party along the railway had no lanterns; they knew that the light would inevitably betray them, and so spoil the chances of capture. The detachment underneath had railway lanterns, closed, and so not likely to be observed amid the brushwood which shrouded the paths through the wood.

We will follow the railway detachment first. They made their way easily enough along the line, and soon arrived near the viaduct.

"Now," said the station-master, "lie down here," indicating the slope of the embankment; "and let me go on alone to reconnoitre."

The constables, the porters, and the booking-clerk lay down as directed, while Mr. Kenrick stealthily continued his way.

He reached the end of the viaduct. A dull, rasping sound came to his ears. He went forward, still silently, creeping between the metals in the six-foot way like a panther.*

Unperceived, the station-master crept nearer and nearer, and when he reached the viaduct he crept to the side, and, lying flat down, peeped over and beneath it. He could have distinguished nothing if he tried to peer between the boards of the bridge; but, from his position, he was enabled to make out the figure of a man engaged in sawing through a beam just where it joined a cross-piece, so as to undermine both the supports at once.

There was no hammering; the work was proceeding almost in silence. Soon the station-master's eyes became accustomed to the shade and to the dark

* The six-foot way is the space between the two outer rails of the up and down lines—not between the metals of each line.

background, and he could make out two other men engaged in sawing the upper part of the bridge—the flooring itself, so that the sleepers might be taken out. But the work, proceeding rapidly as it did, was continued so noiselessly, that Kenrick scarcely could credit his senses.

There was quite a gang of men employed up amid the timbers with silent saws and implements, wedges, and crows, which widened and enlarged the gaps made by the restless saws. Ten men—all as busy as bees, and working in a nefarious cause as they had never worked for wages. The creaking and crashing of the beams might now and then be heard, and the splash of a bolt or nut into the brawling stream might perhaps have been detected by daylight; but in the darkness, amid the noise of the torrent, the singing of the wires, and the answering of the wind, the work appeared quite noiseless.

The station-master was puzzled. He could not reach the men in their then elevated positions, and he could not permit them to continue their work. He had prepared a Bengal light of some intensity, a simple mixture of antimony, nitre, and sulphur in the proportions of one, two, and three, which, when lighted, gives a brilliant and harmless flame, in which no nook or cranny can remain unseen.

This compound the agent had wrapped in touch-paper, made by steeping common brown paper in saltpetre. He placed his light on a beam beneath the bridge, and set fire to the paper. In a few moments the workmen ceased their labours, and began to regard the spark with some suspicion and apprehension.

They did not stir, however, as no gleam yet shone forth, and the agent, running hastily back, directed the



THE WRECKERS FOILED (*see p. 219*).

first- and second-class coaches and a tank engine. In these coaches were one woman—Mrs. Eldred—and four gentlemen from the Engineers' and Permanent Way Department, who had come to inspect the viaduct. A porter was then sent down the line to conduct the expected passenger train to the bridge, over which the passengers could walk to the other coaches, and resume their route with the tank engine, when the baggage had been transferred.

These arrangements had rapidly been made under authority as soon as Mrs. Eldred's slip of paper had been read and digested. She had begged permission to come, and, having left Sally with Polyphemus junior, she started to meet her husband, to be the first to welcome him in safety from the threatening danger.

Polyphemus was on his mettle. He had escaped a serious disaster, and came dashing along in anticipation of his rest, when, suddenly, the red signal lamp beamed upon him. This check annoyed him. Warned to pull up in his career, not far from his destination, when he had promised a respite to his masters and to himself, he uttered a loud, shrill, and prolonged scream expressive of his distaste and disappointment.

Nevertheless, the envious red eye never changed. It stared and blinked at the approaching train, which still came on at a good pace. *Polyphemus* did not intend to pull up at the distance signal till he had sighted the home light. If that were "on," he would advance quietly and feel his way to the obstruction, but the distance signal he regarded merely as a warning, and passed it with reduced speed accordingly.

Eldred quite understood his favourite steed, and

petted him. He did not worry him, but let him glide on, wondering the while what was the matter. Both he and his fireman were looking out for a signal, and the advancing light carried by the porter was soon met with. *Polyphemus* fretted and fumed at being thus detained; he exploded little jets of steam from the safety-valve, and hissed angrily at the porter, who took no notice of his flashing white eyes, but calmly jumped upon him.

"What's up, Bill?" was the driver's question. "A pitch in?"

"No. It would ha' been, though, but for your missus; she——"

"My missus!" exclaimed Eldred. "What's she in it for?"

"I can't tell: just pull down to the viaduct. Some of the chaps have been tryin' to undermine it or something, to break the line, and smash your train up; only your missus found it out, and got assistance somehow—I don't know how."

"God bless her!" said Eldred, fervently. "My good genus is turnin' up now, I declare."

The fireman listened in silence. He recognised the terrible danger they had escaped, and he added mentally his prayer for Mary, his mate's wife.

"She's a stunner, Bob," he said at length. "Just splendid! I wonder how she knowed it."

"That's beyond me, mate. How does a woman know anything and everything? I do believe they inhales it in the air, and it gets into their heads by the lungs, like. It's very surprisin' to me what women *don't* know sometimes; but what they *do* know is more surprisin' still!"

"I believe you're right," remarked the porter. "Pull up now, Bob, and we'll transfer the passengers."

Polyphemus somewhat sulkily stopped again ; but he groaned and crunched the rails, and squeaked his wheels against the brake, making the tender rattle, shaking the foot-plate, and setting all the fire-irons clanging together.

"Woa, *Polly* !" cried the fireman. "Easy there !"

Polyphemus subsided into himself, and by degrees cooled down into a mere spectator of the scenes that followed ; but, under all his calm exterior, he had a heated temper, which might break out at any moment !

The meeting between Mary Eldred and her husband was most affectionate and touching. The narrow escape the passengers had had soon became known to them, and the part Mrs. Eldred had played was the theme of admiration of all present. The sympathy did not stop there. Next day the *Times* had a full account of the event, and three correspondents testified to the young woman's bravery and energy. A subscription was set on foot, and a substantial sum of money was collected for "Baby," and presented through the Secretary of the Railway Company. The Board of Directors approved of her conduct in very high terms, and voted her a sum of fifty pounds down, and insured her husband's life for five hundred pounds besides.

No wonder Eldred considered that his good genius had arisen. His fortunes were rising fast, and prosperity seemed to wait on him.

Polyphemus all this time behaved himself with the greatest propriety, and was in no degree puffed up by the good fortune with which he found himself associated. He did not arrive home for a whole day after the capture of the malcontents, as the viaduct had to

be temporarily strengthened, and finally rebuilt of iron. But no accident happened. The trains were light, and every precaution was taken, so that when the strike had ended—which it did after certain concessions had been made on both sides—the traffic was scarcely interrupted at any time.

Mrs. Fitt's husband was lucky enough to escape, and find his way home. He lay concealed for a time, but eventually came out, and went to work again on the Company's terms—a wiser, if not a better, man. Baker did not again appear as leader; he occupied his leisure in exhorting carmen to "come out," because a man at the distant docks had been dismissed for some misconduct. But the carmen remained in work, and Baker's flowery eloquence grew stale.

These latter incidents have little bearing upon the history of *Polyphemus*, who, with his driver, was soon to be distinguished above all his fellows in a more peaceful and less dramatic manner. But what this episode lacked in sensation it gained in public interest, and for once in his life Robert Eldred felt a glow of pride of place!

He and *Polyphemus* were selected to run the Royal train, and we will devote a chapter or two to the method and the means whereby the Sovereign is carried over our railway lines on her long but easy-going trips from south to north, or *vice versa*.

CHAPTER XXI.

POLYPHEMUS RUNS WITH THE QUEEN—HOW THE QUEEN TRAVELS BY RAILWAY—ELDRED'S LUCK.

"SHA'N'T be at work to-morrow, Molly lass," said Eldred to his wife a few days after the occurrences related in the last chapter. "Got a holiday like!"

"A holiday, Bob! why, whatever for?"

"Ah!" he replied, mysteriously, "that's my secret. It is a secret, too," he continued after a pause, "a regular up-and-down secret!"

"You'll tell me, Bob dear, won't you?"

"Tell thee! Why, if I did the'd let it out for sure."

"Oh, Bob, did I ever tell one of your secrets in my life? You know I never did."

"Ay, my girl, I know it. Because I never told the' one, though!" he replied, laughing. "But this isn't much secret after all. I'm to see Mr. Overdean, the superintendent, to-morrow, if he is up; or, anyway, the loco' foreman."

"What for, dear?" asked Mrs. Eldred, carelessly. There was no secret after all, and her interest had slackened visibly. So she went on sewing, with attention apparently concentrated exclusively on her needlework. But her ears were sensitive to outward occurrences.

"It's about *Polyphemus*; I suspect I'll have to drive the Queen next week, and we've got to look over the ingen, Molly!"

"Drive the Queen—really, Robert! You've hinted at it before, but——"

"But now it's a'most certain! *Polyphemus* is a fine ingin, and I'm her driver, likewise my mate is considered good; but, maybe, Mr. Coates will select another fireman."

"Then both engine and engine-men are chosen?" asked Mrs. Eldred.

"They are. But if *Polyphemus* goes, as I am told he is a'most sure to, then I shall go too, I b'lieve."

Mrs. Eldred was silent, and a pause ensued, during which Bob lighted his pipe and sat contemplating the probable future—the expected trip over his own system with the Queen, and the reflected glory which would illuminate him as a "Royal Driver."

Nor was Molly less pleased. Whenever an engine-driver is selected to drive the Royal train his surroundings are, in a way, affected; his wife and children are interviewed, and the former has been known to go about amongst her neighbours and chat on the most indifferent or household subjects, never alluding to the honour which awaits her husband until the moment comes for parting, when a sudden thought strikes her that her husband will want certain clean garments next day, "as he is drivin' the Queen's train!"

Then the flood-gates of curiosity are at once opened, and the carefully withheld secret is dispersed to the four winds.

This not uncommon procedure was not departed from in the present instance. Mrs. Eldred, leaving her husband in the enjoyment of his pipe, quitted the sitting-room, ostensibly for the purpose of "looking up his clothes," for your self-respecting engine-driver would not drive the Queen in a shabby, dirty condition—indeed, it would not be permitted. But "little Mrs. Eldred" must first pay a visit to the yard, and, if

by chance Mrs. Fitt was in her "garden," a reference to Fitt would provoke inquiry for Eldred, and the desired opening for the delightful confidence would be found.

Fitt, whose essay in bridge-breaking had not tended to his comfort either at home or abroad, had just returned to work. No one had betrayed his share in the nefarious transaction in which he had been mixed up, and he felt better in mind and body, albeit his wife rather despised him for his part in the business, and gave him many a "back-hander," as he designated hidden references to his experiences while he was out on strike.

The usual conversation over the palings ensued, and in fifteen minutes the whole row of cottage tenants—mostly people connected with the railway—knew that Bob Eldred and his engine, *Polyphemus*, would pass on Monday with the Royal train!

Travellers say that in India there is an underground, or mysterious post, or other means, by which news is conveyed with startling rapidity and correctness by the natives; and that intelligence, unknown to the Government, is discussed in the bazaars before it has been received at the Governor's residence. The rapid and mysterious conveyance of news by the Hindoos or other native races was, however, nearly equalled by the transmission of the information, imparted "as a secret" to Mrs. Fitt.

When Eldred strolled out, in the full enjoyment of anticipations of a holiday next day, he was interviewed and congratulated by individuals who lived nearly a mile away.

"Oh, *I've* heard the news," exclaimed one woman—the wife of an engine-driver. "So *you've* got the trip. My Tom was chose first for it, I hear."

With this imaginative and jealous slap at Eldred's self-gratulation, the neighbour pursues her way, and another succeeds, lamenting her husband's luck, but congratulating Eldred. So the news flew, and the engine-driver was puzzled to account for the manner in which it had been disseminated, when his wife, he knew, had never quitted the house.

Next day the interview with the foreman took place. Few people, but those actually behind the scenes, or those who, like the writer, have been permitted a peep into the mysteries of travel, and the Royal train service, can appreciate, or even become aware of, the extraordinary amount of labour and trouble and care taken by a railway company's officials when the Queen travels. The bare record of the journey is small enough. Her Majesty passed from such a place to such another place, Mr. Dash and So-and-so accompanied the train, and the engine was in charge of Mr. Baring. Such details as are published relate to the outward and visible running of the train, but the numerous other means taken to ensure the Queen's safety and quiet are unsuspected by the immense majority of her subjects.

Eldred was down with *Polyphemus*, as directed, next morning, for he expected to be questioned about her, and, if his replies satisfied the foreman or other official, he might expect to put on his Sunday suit, and drive the Queen—unless she were starting late at night, when a less show of exterior would be equally acceptable.

Polyphemus was standing proudly and erect over the pit, which, as most people are aware, is a bricked, grave-like opening in locomotive sidings, with steps leading into it, from which the whole of the

machinery of the engine can be examined conveniently by the driver and his superior, at any time.

Locomotives are generally looked over carefully on one day in the week, and drivers have "shed days" on some railways. On these days their engines are examined by them, and any little defects made good. This weekly inspection is absolutely necessary to proper running and serviceableness.

It is needless to say that *Polyphemus* was thoroughly examined when the cleaning had been accomplished. Eldred's engine had gained the favour of the superintendent, and he knew Eldred to be a careful man. So the locomotive was washed over, the boiler rinsed out and examined, the whole machine thoroughly cleaned by the youths employed for the purpose, all brass-work and paint made to look "splendiferous," and when all this was done, or nearly done, the bolts and rivets tested, and all "as clean as a new pin," the true inspection commenced.

Certainly, *Polyphemus* looked a hero that day! His shining coat, his sparkling taps and gauges, the brass rim on the wheel casings, the burnished letters of his name—all were splendid. The wheels, cranks, rods, and slide-bars were glistening. It seemed almost a pity to dirty the fire-box, or to touch the bright levers without putting gloves on.

Eldred and his superior officer went about together and minutely inspected the engine which seemed entirely fit for the great and responsible duty soon to be imposed on "her." Numerous questions put by the foreman as to the performance of his engine were answered satisfactorily, for only the driver could know the actual behaviour of the loco-

motive "under steam." But the examination of both engine and driver proved satisfactory to the foreman. He sees that the tubes, too, are clean, and, in fact, everything that experience and caution dictated has been done. So Eldred is told to be ready to take the Royal train that night as far as Swivelthorpe Junction, when the train would be handed over to the officials of the other railway, over which her Majesty would subsequently travel.

Then the resplendent locomotive, with a careless, but somewhat haughty, air, permits itself to be put in the shed, and a fire to be lighted in the well-cleaned furnace, from which, and the bars, every atom of foreign matter has been eliminated. The perfectly clean boiler is partly filled with water : a good coal is shot into the tender, which has also received its share of attention, and the fine machine, purring loudly, as it is being prepared for its "run," looks every way worthy of its devotion to her Majesty's service.

But the train has not yet arrived. We go down the line a little way, and see whether the Royal train is approaching. It has been examined, tested, cleaned, and made as handsome as possible inside and out. The gas is not yet in the reservoir, but it will be put in shortly : the oil is in the axle-boxes, and the wheels are "blocked" ; no spokes are visible. Comfortable "carriage-steps" open from the doors of the compartments ; no unsightly "footboard" interferes with the Royal descent. The springs are of the latest and easiest pattern ; tie-rods support the axle-boxes from end to end. The buffers work well and gently, the couplings are screwed up tightly, and no jerking is possible. It is the perfection of locomotion.

Here it comes ! the Royal train is just entering the shed, where it will be finally examined and dusted,

supplied with gas and water, and thoroughly seen to, so that the Royal party may want for nothing during the many hours they will be travelling night and day. Let us go and see this "beautified" train, with its white topped vehicles and saloons, of which there are twelve in the following order.

Starting from the front, where in a few hours *Polyphemus* will be harnessed first, next to the engine, is a brake-van, and then in order come (2) a carriage for the men servants; (3) one for pages and upper servants; (4) one for dressers and ladies' maids; (5) ladies-in-waiting; (6) personal servants, and the Queen's dressers; then (7) the Royal saloon for her Majesty and the Princess; (8) the second Royal saloon for (say) Prince Henry of Battenberg; (9) the carriage for the officers of the household, and the doctor; then (10) the carriage for directors of the Company; and finally the *fourgon*, and another brake-van, perhaps a truck, may bring up the rear.

This is the usual train, and on the occasion of which we are speaking this was the manner in which it was made up.

The interior may be briefly described, and then all readers will be acquainted with the surroundings amidst which her Majesty generally travels.

The saloons in the centre of the train are exclusively used by Royal personages, unless the respect of the Company for an individual is very great, when perhaps one of the saloons is placed at the disposal of an eminent personage on special occasions. The saloons are furnished with beds, the floors are carpeted, the ceilings are padded, and the lamps are carefully shaded. Communication is established with the attendants, and also throughout the train, by

electric bells, nor need the Queen rise to sound these—a “lazy pulley,” or cord furnished with an electric button, is beside her, and a simple pressure alarms the guard immediately.

The train is supplied with various brakes, that most used by any company being at hand whether steam or air-brake, or the “vacuum.” There is a smoking-room in the Prince’s carriage, and bed, lavatory, and stove; the Queen’s compartments, or apartments, are warmed by hot water. So it will be seen that nothing is neglected. The windows, which are of plate-glass, and large, are curtained so that perfect privacy may be obtained.

On the table of the saloon is a beautifully printed mauve time-table, bearing the Royal Arms, and gold-lettered. This gives all particulars of the distance, the times, and stopping-places of the train, in accordance with the Queen’s desire already intimated. These “times” are faithfully adhered to, and *Polyphemus* would not dare to run faster than the time laid down, especially as he will be closely watched. When he is released, and the next Company’s engine attached, he may return home, as directed, with some train, or perhaps without one.

But the time approaches; the train is ready, and *Polyphemus* backs down to the van to be coupled up tightly, and to run to the place where the Royal party will enter the saloons. But with the train is a staff of officials and *employés*. There are a locomotive superintendent, an inspector, some directors, a band of telegraph operatives, workmen, fitters, and “greasers”; a person seated on the tender to “keep his eye” upon the train, and a time-keeper on the foot-plate of the engine. All these people accompany the train, and are ready for any emergency.

Eldred is perfectly independent of all these people. He is going to run the train, and no one will interfere with *him*. He knows his business thoroughly ; he is well acquainted with the road, and will keep time. The man beside him, watch in hand, will "time" him all the way he goes, because there is a pilot engine just fifteen minutes in advance, and this space of time must be in no way exceeded nor diminished appreciably. The pilot runs at a certain pace, say thirty-five or thirty-six miles an hour, including stoppages ; and this chosen pace must necessarily be adhered to by *Polyphemus*.

Humanly speaking, nothing untoward can befall the Queen, and Eldred knows the various precautions which have been taken. He knows—no one better—that the pilot engine, with a fireman, a guard, lamps, and signals, is speeding ahead ready to give him a hint to stop at any obstacle. He knows—few so well—that no carriage, train, or engine can cross or pass along the same line as he within thirty minutes of his approach, save the "pilot."

He is aware that all trains must pass him at reduced speed, and no whistling, or any escape of steam, must be indulged in as they pass, nor if he is in a station must any other train enter it. He knows that every "goods" train is examined to see that nothing carried is likely to protrude too far, and that every gate is locked, every set of points or switch is bolted, before the Royal train comes. Sidings are spiked back and shut off, and if the gracious Sovereign of these realms were the veriest tyrant who ever ascended a throne, no greater care could be taken by engine-men to keep clear of her ! They scuttle out of the way, and shunt with alacrity, as the printed circular demands. Platelayers watch the road, guard

crossings; and the whole route is mapped out, and all the traffic upset when the Royal train is on the "war-path."

Such a responsible post as driver to the Royal train is only given to special men, and it is an honour. But Eldred is ready; he has no concern about the Queen as sovereign. He has to run a course in a certain time, and whether the Queen is in the train or not, or whether the general manager is there or not, Eldred will still run his "level best," and look after *Polyphemus*, who knows what *he* is about!

So he starts: his train is coupled on; the Royal party and the officials are all "aboard." Nothing remains for him but to do his duty, and, from what we already know of him, we may be sure his duty will be faithfully done.

There goes *Polyphemus* rushing with carefully moderated pace through the night. People come and try to see the Royal occupants, but they only see shaded windows, a fine engine, lighted first-class carriages or saloons, sweeping past with wonderful celerity and smoothness, and with little noise or clatter. A cloud of white steam, no smoke, no whistling, a clear road—a rush of wind and whirr of wheels—and the train has gone by! What is it after all? "Nothing extraordinary," you say; but think of the efforts which have been made to attain this perfection, this "concealed art," this poetry of locomotion!

And perhaps the most unconcerned individual in the whole train, except *Polyphemus*, is Robert Eldred, the driver, who knows his work, and is simply driving a moderately fast train with a clear road ahead. He is the real master of the situation, and he knows it.

So the Queen is carried to her destination while her subjects sleep, or toss in pain, or die, or are born along her route. Then the tension is relaxed, the points are unfixed, the line resumes its usual bustle and appearance. The engines smoke, whistle, and play about; people frequent level crossings, and haunt the lately deserted platforms. The "charm is snapped;" the railway is awake again; the revival has come!

CHAPTER XXII.

RAINS HAS HIS REVENGE—THE BALLAST TRAIN— A SNOWSTORM AND A CHECK.

"WELL, Bob, I suppose you feel a great man now since you've driven the Queen," said Mrs. Eldred when her husband came back next day—"a great man, indeed!"

"I think nothin' of the sort," replied the engine-driver; "why should I? The Queen didn't take any notice o' me! I had to drive th' ingin, that's all."

"Then I hope you'll settle down now, and have no more accidents and adventures, Bob; a'most ever since our marriage you've been in some kind of a scrape. It's that engine, *Polyphemus*: she's unlucky!"

"Unlucky!" exclaimed Eldred. "Why, she's the luckiest ingin out! Ain't I now a first-class man, equal to runnin' the Royal train with her? There ain't many men who's got up as quick. Unlucky!"

Why, I wouldn't give up *Polyphemus* any more than I'd give thee up, Polly!"

There was a little pause after this, and a short entertainment of a domestic nature in which the baby took part, and when Bob Eldred sat in his parlour after supper, with his pipe in his mouth, his feet on the fender, or occasionally on the hob, his wife at work beside him, you would hardly have recognised him as the engine-driver who had had so many escapes and thrilling experiences.

"Bob," asked his wife, suddenly, looking up from her sewing, "what did they do to those men who tried to smash the viaduct?"

"Gave 'em hard labour," he replied. "Tim Fitt was lucky over that business. How's his missus?"

"But poorly, I think. She's worried, she says with Bains, their lodger. He's curious, she says."

"Ay, I've heard he's queer: he'll do something some day and be sorry for it."

"Is he really cracked, Bob, as some say?"

"Well, he ain't mad if the' means that, but he's likely to do somethin' silly. He's 'freaky,' and when he's on his ballast engine he's careless like."

"Ballast engine-work is a line-repairing business, isn't it?"

"Ay: the ballast train is the permanent-way train: the gravel on the line is 'ballast,' and the train is under the permanent-way department."

"Permanent-way! Well, why is it called that? If a line is always under repair, and gettin' renewed and mended, I wouldn't exactly call it permanent—would you?"

"Well, now that never occurred to me, lass. All

these years as I've been firin' and drivin' I've never thought o' that. I can't tell thee ; I doubt if any of us could. But what about Bains?"

"Nothin', he seems harmless enough. Still, he has dreamy ways, and looks queer—and if I was Mr. Fitt I'd not have him in the house."

"It's none of our business," replied Eldred. "Now I'll turn in, Molly. I'm on the early trip to-morrow mornin'."

"I'm sorry for it," replied his wife. "It will be bitter cold, and the clouds looked like snow this afternoon."

"Can't help that," said Bob Eldred, philosophically. "Cold or no cold, we must run the trains. I'd like to know what the directors and passengers would say if we said as it was too cold to run the ingins?"

"But it is dreadful at night, Bob, isn't it?"

"Ay: pretty tidy bad. Drivin' an ingin agen drivin' snow isn't the pleasantest duty. But it's got to be done, Polly, so no more's to be said."

"I only hope it won't snow when you're in charge, Bob. What time to-morrow?"

"Seven sharp, lass. I've to take the 9.40 out."

Mrs. Eldred was one of those pattern wives, who not only study their husbands, but who also make it their business to understand their husbands' study or profession and assist them in their work. Mary Eldred had studied locomotives as well as she could, and had on more than one occasion written out reports for her husband. She had also become acquainted with routine railway work, and knew Bob's times of going out and returning: his afternoons "off," and his late nights.

Sometimes they would go out together on those early afternoons, and have a turn in the adjacent park,

or a treat to Hampton Court, baby and all! Bob was well known, and managed to travel without any large expenditure of money; and the ticket-examiners were not so *very* particular about "Bob's missus," who was a general favourite with his acquaintance. Thus it happened that the excursions were cheap and pleasant in summer and autumn. But winter had set in now, and the excursions had been given up for some time then.

Young Polyphemus was growing quite a big boy, and took tremendous notice of engines and trains. His father had already made up his mind to make him an engine-driver, and was delighted with his appreciation of the locomotives.

Mrs. Eldred's forebodings as to the weather were unfortunately realised next morning. While men slept, the soft and gentle snowflakes had fallen silently from the dull, leaden sky, which overhung the metropolis and the country for twelve miles round. It was no hurried snowfall, this—the clouds had been quietly preparing the weather for some days; practising little snowstorms at times, so as to warn the vestries that more was at hand. But as the vestries were in their usual somewhat somnolent state, the warning was unheeded. Now the clouds had fulfilled their promise, and the fall was extensive as well as heavy.

When Mrs. Eldred—most punctual and wakeful of wives—awoke next morning, she perceived a curious sheen of daylight, and turned cold with terror lest she had for once overslept herself. She had not heard anyone rapping, but she felt as if the time had passed; there was Bob still asleep and *Polyphemus* without its master.

She leaped up and rushed to the window which

was beside her on her left hand, for the Eldreds held some superstition concerning the benefits which arise from lying head to the north. So Mrs. Eldred looked east out of her window, and perceived by the fine white dust which lay so lightly within the casement that there had been snow in the night.

She looked out, but could see nothing beyond a whirling, eddying world outside ; so full of snowflakes that the end wall of the "garden" was invisible, though generally distinguishable on the darkest night, and a thick white sheet of snow lay level and undisturbed all around. Pretty fern and leaf patterns were fringed on the casement, and the wind blew eddies of flakes around Mr. Fitt's premises, and wrapped the parapets in wool-like garb.

Turning, shivering, from the window, Mary Eldred lighted a match, and saw the time was five minutes to seven. So she began her toilet, while Robert still slept ; and, when she had finished and "tidied-up," she woke him, and told him to "hurry along," as it was after seven and snowing heavily.

This was not pleasant news, but Eldred turned out and dressed rapidly. He had no need to shave, for he wore a bushy beard, so his dressing was not a lengthy business. The fire was burning brightly, a lamp was on the table, and breakfast nearly ready when he came down.

"Nice weather," he remarked. "Better put me up a good bit o' dinner, Molly, and a can o' tea. I'll want it afore noon, I expect."

"A dreadful day, Bob ; what *will* you do ?"

"Do ! Why, go out with the ingen. Don't thee get frightened if I'm late home : the snow's thickenin'. Where's my coat ?"

Eldred was assisted into his pilot cloth coat, a warm comforter tied round his neck, and with his thick dark trousers tucked into his boots, he made his way, bag in hand, to the engine shed.

When he entered the yard the scene struck him forcibly. Black lines were visible intersecting the snow-plain, and many colossal objects wreathed in white, like objects stuck all over with cotton-wool, stood silent and motionless in the sidings. These were locomotives, not presently wanted, which had passed a miserable night outside the sheds in a wilderness of trucks and goods waggons, cold and silent.

The running sheds looked black in contrast with the snow, and from within gleamed lamps. A more decided glow in one part indicated the whereabouts of the never-dying flame, which is utilised for the lighting of locomotive fires.

Eldred "signed on," and ascertained where his *Polyphemus* was. He found his fireman already busy about the engine.

"Mornin', Jack!" he cried. "Nice day, ain't it? All ready? Any news?"

"No," replied the fireman. "Bains has been up swearin' at his mate for bein' behind, and I b'lieve he's taken the train out empty. He's got to find the gang on the road, he says. There's a slip near Mineford, on the up-road."

"Won't hurt us, I hope," said Eldred. "I'm just thinkin' Bains is a bit 'dicky,' Jack."

"I'd rather he wouldn't run just ahead of us," said Jack.

The conversation ended, as the engine had to be examined. Snow continued to fall fast, and the weather evidently deterred passengers from starting.

The train was not by any means full, and consequently *Polyphemus* had a light load.

"All right, Jack?"

"In a minute," replied the fireman. "We shall be ready in a minute. Some people want foot-warmers. I'm kind o' sorry Bains has taken out the ballast train by himself. He wouldn't wait for another mate, and he may do some damage—to theingin or himself. Right!"

"Oh! he won't go far," replied Eldred. "He's mad, in my opinion, and some of the station-masters will check him, sure. Howsumdever, keep your eyes open, though; the snow is blindin' enough."

The uncertainty of darkness was certainly absent from this trip, but the snow was even more confusing. The signals had got patched with it, and after a while the red glasses and semaphores got white with it, as it drove against them. This did not so much matter by day, as all arms at "danger" could be distinguished, but at night the glass might be completely coated, and the signals obscured, unless steps were taken to cleanse them.

The wind was piercing; the cold on the faces of the engine-men was intense; the snowflakes hung on Eldred's beard and froze there as *Polyphemus*, brushing aside the snow from the rails, went on hissing and throwing out clouds of steam, which could hardly be distinguished from the falling snowflakes, or from the white mantle which thickly covered the earth, and made trees, hedges, and houses seem positively black by contrast, while the leaden sky seemed to become heavier and heavier as the train proceeded.

A signal in a cutting was anxiously looked for.

Both men knew where the signals were to be seen, and consequently were prepared to stop if they should be against them. On this occasion they could not distinguish the post until quite near it, and then they found the signal partly "on."

"That's meant for 'off,'" remarked the fireman ; "the snow has clogged it."

"It might be meant for 'on,'" replied the driver ; "and the snow might ha' clogged it down, mate. Be handy with thy brake, lad, for I'm mistook if some-thin' ain't in front. Look there !"

The signal suddenly began to jump and jerk up and down as they passed it. Eldred shut off steam, and put on his "vacuum," at the same time whistling loudly to warn the guards.

The signal-box, a mass of snow, was soon sighted, and on the line in front was the ballast train, slowly backing down the incline to meet them.

The driver, if he were on the engine, had apparently lost all control of the ballast train, and it was fortunate that Eldred had interpreted the signal in a cautious manner, or he might have dashed into the trucks at speed.

But no sooner did he perceive them on the line than he reversed his engine, and prepared to back also. Some few minutes were occupied in all these manœuvres, and the runaways had approached within a hundred yards when *Polyphemus* began to retrace his steps. His first movements were not rapid ; in his anxiety he began to slip and stammer on the rails ; but his indulgent driver humoured him, and he backed down pretty fast.

Meanwhile the trucks had approached, and *Polyphemus* perceived that they would hit him sharply unless he accommodated his pace nearly to theirs.

This he did, and when the hindermost waggon, a brake, struck him, he recoiled.

This was an attack for which our hero was not unprepared, and, yielding at first to the impulse, he returned the blow with interest. But Eldred then interfered, and with great tact succeeded in preventing any further hostile movements. He managed to save the passengers from any rude shocks, and after the aggressive tail-van had received some damage, the two trains were safely brought to a standstill near the bottom of the incline, at the top of which was the "chalk siding."

Then the passengers turned out ; one of the guards made his way as well as he could through the falling snow to signal any advancing train, while Eldred, leaving *Polyphemus*, who was very angry and spluttering, in charge of the fireman, hastened up the snow-clad bank to the signal-box with the other guard, where they fancied they could perceive that a struggle of some kind was taking place.

Nor were they deceived. There were two men in the box wrestling, panting in a deadly embrace ; and it was only a question of moments when they arrived. The unfortunate signalman was gripped by the maddened driver of the ballast train, who looked as murderous as anyone could. He was doing his best to strangle the other when Eldred and the guard fortunately arrived, and, not without difficulty, succeeded in pulling Bains away from his adversary.

The former struggled fearfully, and it was now apparent that he had completely lost his reason. It needed all the efforts of the three men to secure him, and not without the use of force did they succeed in getting him down. Even then he kicked and bit and

fought with fury, until the signalman in his rage partially stunned him with a violent blow.

A strap! The signalman's waist-belt was then utilised to bind Bains's legs, and his wrists were fastened behind his back with a piece of whip-cord which the guard produced. Then, and not till then, could Eldred and his companion arrive at any explanation of this most unexpected encounter. The signalman, though somewhat exhausted, had yet sufficient breath to relate the circumstances:—

"I saw the ballast train coming," he said, "and as soon as it passed the box I could see something was wrong, so I shouted to that mad fool yonder to go into the sidin' as your train was due on. He went along after abusin' me, and I began to git frightened, as he and me have had words, and he looked wild. However, he pulled into the sidin', as I thought, and then you were signalled, and I let you come on. But in this storm I couldn't have distinctly seen the tail of the ballast train, and when I tried to set the points over I found I couldn't do it—the whole train wasn't over; and to make it worse, Bains there had got off his engine and was comin' up here!

"I was in a puzzle, you may guess, and put up your signal, but it wouldn't go home, and while I was shakin' it about Bains came in and began at me again. That he was queer I could see, and he tried to interfere with the levers, pushin' me about. Then we got fightin', and as we were strugglin' you came on, and the trucks began to run back on the line. I saw he was about mad, or drunk, and tried to cool him, but he swore he'd be revenged on me, and we wrestled—as you saw. If you hadn't come in I b'lieve I'd 'a been murdered outright. Here's a pretty mess for the general manager!"

"Ay, it's a nice business!" remarked the guard. "However he managed to get away is a puzzle to me."

"Oh, those mad fellows are as cunnin' as cats," replied the signalman. "He was bent on a run, and would have played the mischief with the traffic maybe if I hadn't roused him and brought him up here. It's a good thing you slackened, Bob—a very good thing!"

"He's as mad as a March hare," said Eldred, looking at the now awakened driver, who was foaming and struggling on the floor. "What made him like this?"

"He got an ugly knock some time ago," replied the signalman, "and has been queer for some time, but he is so cunnin' that you wouldn't think it of him; and he's so silent that no one suspected he was wrong at all. We've had disputes, he and me, and I've reported him a couple of times when he was here before. So he got fined, and then my daughter's death preyed on his mind."

"I can't see why your daughter's death should have made him attack you so bad," remarked the guard.

"It's a long story; but my brother took offence after they were engaged, and went off. The girl was fond of him, and——"

"Died, eh? Poor thing! And you, maybe, had a finger in the pie, and separated them," said Eldred, coldly.

"I didn't think she was the wife for him, that's certain," replied the signalman, sullenly. "But that's no excuse for murderin' me!"

"Well, he's not responsible," replied the guard. "Why he never went for ye before I don't know."

"Because he wasn't on this turn. But he remembered him," replied Eldred. "Howsumdever, we must be gettin' on. Let's put the 'ballast' in the sidin' and go on to Mineford with the news."

CHAPTER XXIII.

OUT IN THE COLD—A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE—
LAST TRIP OF OLD *POLYPHEMUS*—ELDRED IN A
FIX—CONCLUSION.

POLYPHEMUS continued his melancholy journey, carrying in the train the disabled Bains, for delivery at Mineford, where some explanations were forthcoming which placed the driver of the ballast train in a more favourable aspect. It was ascertained that he had been ordered out with the ballast waggons to remove a slip on the up-line, and so far he was not to blame, save that he had come out unattended by a fireman—a circumstance which, in the thickly falling snow and darkness, the pointsman had not perceived.

Again, the fireman was late coming on, and missed his train. Bains being rather eccentric, to say the least, proceeded at once, without waiting for the navvies, and, in his "madness" and temper, aroused by the signalman, had managed to let his train go back on the passenger train from the line sidings when he should have "filled up" his trucks.

When Eldred had heard all this he recollected that Mr. Fitt had mentioned the attachment which

Bains had cherished for the signalman's daughter, and the somewhat harsh separation of the lovers, which had culminated in the death of the young girl. Putting these facts together—the melancholy of Bains, his hereditary malady, his desire for revenge, nursed until he should meet the signalman, and the occurrence of the opportunity—the attempt to punish his enemy seemed not unnatural in one of his temperament. He was eventually put under gentle restraint, and after a few years reported quite cured.

The snowstorm showed no signs of abatement during the remainder of Eldred's "run." His fireman and he had put the ballast train safely in the siding, and the points were locked. Another engine was telegraphed for, and after a while the ballast train and its navvies got to work. But the block on the up line delayed the traffic, and this stoppage caused another stoppage. The continually drifting snow accumulated, and the unlucky ballast train had some difficulty in getting away when evening arrived.

Five o'clock was approaching, and the time for the return journey of our hero, *Polyphemus*, was at hand. He had been ready some minutes when the signal permitted him to pass out; the black dome of the sky overhead, the white carpet of snow underneath, with black lines drawn across it, for his guidance.

It seemed curious to Eldred, as he contemplated the white carpet and the thin pencilled lines of steel across the expanse, that his engine and its train should be able to find their way home with such small assistance. At the points the snow had been cleared away, leaving dark patches here and there in the yard, and about the station. But beyond, in the wide-spreading covering of snow, nothing but trees, hedges, or a solitary house, broke the line. In the

town all was slush under foot, sloppy pavements, white roofs, bobbing umbrellas, and spotted clothing ; the flakes fell, visible in the light of shops, and invisible on the roads and houses.

Away once more. Home again ! *Polyphemus* is not to be hindered to-night ; he puffs loudly and almost cheerfully notwithstanding the storm which is raging round him !

"Say, Jack, this is a tidy bluster," remarked the engine-driver as the blast caught them in the open. "Mind your fire, my lad."

"Ay, ay," was Jack's reply. "We'll manage it. It's a bad night, and, crossin' the moor, we shall have it ! Is there many passengers ?"

"Very few ; and all the better," replied Eldred, as the wind, bringing a cloud of whirling flakes across the track, confused him. "This is a nasty night !"

"A young woman asked me just now in the station if I wasn't afeard to go out such a night," remarked Jack in his mate's ear. "Said when we had to, we did it !"

"Ah !" was the only response, for Eldred could hardly hear a word in the noise and roar of the wind in the trees, the rattling of the engine, and the confusing beating of the snow at his side.

"Shouldn't mind if I was at home," he muttered to himself. "This seems gettin' a bit strong !"

Strong, indeed, was hardly the term for it. The pressure of the wind was tremendous. It seemed as if all the demons of the storm-king had been let loose across that open space—a moorland—over which the snow was driven in clouds of lengthy arrows, white shafts of snow discharged many cloth-yards in length ; no longer whirling and falling easily, after some consideration where they would fall. There was no

coyness and hesitation—no picking and choosing a resting-place, as is so often remarked the white, fastidious flakes will do ; but a regular attack on the line : a vicious, pelting snowstorm—at times rushing in myriad dots upon the train, battling with *Polyphemus*, and trying to cover him with a white mantle like a Crusader.

At other times a sudden pause and an upcast high in air, as if the snow had suddenly recollected that it had left something behind, and meant to return to obtain it. Then making up its mind again as suddenly, the mass of flakes impulsively swooped on again, bent on progress anyhow ; each careless whither it went so that it went somewhere ; onward, onward !

Yet silently they fell. After all the turmoil of this passage, and their headlong flight from the rounded clouds, they tumbled silently and softly ; little stars of ice, formed on the same plan, though with many variations of figure ; and, though separated in their ærial birthplace by tens of miles, they are united here on earth, packed closely on this wild moorland, and combining to stop the fiery “monster Polypheme !”

The impudence of such an effort would have amused the locomotive giant had he given the matter a thought. But such an idea never occurred to him ! The notion of a collection of puny, transparent crystals of ice stopping *his* progress was such a preposterous supposition that it really never entered his head !

Nevertheless, the snowflakes had apparently decided to try conclusions with the engine. They bided their time ; the wind assisted. It started an eddy, and, when it had found a convenient cutting

at the end of the open moorland, where a low range of hills runs up to view the surrounding country, the snow dipped in quickly, secretly, silently: as if each flake were playing "hide and seek" with the rest, and lay there packed cosily, warmly, together—the epitome of strength in weakness.

But *Polyphemus*, in his haughty pride and consciousness of power, disdained such enemies, and did not slacken speed. The low-lying snow saw him approaching, and received him coldly but firmly; gently yielding for a while, and then enveloping him in its toils. As a spider wraps the captured fly in its silken shroud, so the snow, when *Polyphemus* had been captured, proceeded to enwrap him and his train in a milk-white winding sheet!

"Drifted up, by Jingo!" exclaimed Eldred, as his trusty steed hissed and in other ways expressed its disgust at being foiled by the snowflakes.

"Let us back out at once," said Jack. "We shall never get through ahead."

"I'm not so sure; the drift is small, and the line is pretty clear yonder, I suspect. I'll make a dash of it. Open the whistle."

Polyphemus emitted a loud scream, and began to back. Then, impelled by his fiery temper, he turned again and butted fiercely against the little white mound of air and water, called "snow."

All his efforts resulted in failure. The more he butted the more consolidated became the flakes. He could do nothing, and after a while the white enemy attacked him in a vital part, and began to intrude within the fire-box. It made its approaches insidiously—a "forlorn hope" of flakes penetrated within his defences, and, notwithstanding a warm resistance, they succeeded in nearly

extinguishing his fire, though thousands met death in the attempt.

Then, indeed, *Polyphemus* was conquered! He gave up the struggle: he lost his self-respect. As the dying lion might regard a swarm of carrion flies attacking him, so did our hero regard the snow-flakes. He despised them, spurned them, but they conquered him, and not him only—the carriages and their occupants were invested.

"What's to be done, Bob?" asked a guard, who was up to his waist in snow beside the obliterated track.

"Can't say, Harry! We can't back out, I am afraid. But let the passengers remain, and us go for assistance."

"If we can walk they can manage it," replied the guard. "It's my opinion that if we don't clear out soon we shall never get out alive! We may pass the cutting and reach Mineford some time, but to cross the moor in this storm is impossible."

Eldred nodded, and swung himself down from the foot-plate. *Polyphemus* was dying by inches: he was failing fast, and there seemed no chance of his recovery.

The guard and Eldred then visited the various compartments, and did all in their power to reassure the occupants. In one first-class carriage Eldred came upon a young couple whom he at once recognised. A bride and bridegroom on their return from a wedding tour! Yes; the lady was she who had bestowed upon him the lucky shilling, and the gentleman was he who had given the driver the "fetish" for his watch-chain several years before.*

This unexpected discovery was very pleasing to all parties. The young people listened to the

* A fact.

suggestions put forward, and agreed to make the attempt with the guards and other passengers.

"But what will you do, Mr. Eldred?" asked the young lady.

"Oh! me and my fireman will remain with theingin, ma'am. Glad to see you lookin' so well," he concluded, as he moved away.

"Here, Eldred," said the young gentleman, "you take my flask. I have another, never fear. You and your mate will want something. Look here, take this. Good-bye."

The passengers lost no time in getting away. Jack, the fireman, made an attempt to block the road by signals in the rear of the train, but it was sufficiently protected by the snow. The flakes heaped up and formed a mountain, extending nearly across the cutting in a few hours, and the engine-men could hardly keep the fire up. At length they went to sleep, and the engine cooled. Hours passed in silence.

When they awoke, numbed and shivering, *Polyphemus* was dead! His enemies had triumphed; the snow had conquered him! He stood upright—cold, frozen, dead! The vital spark of his existence had fled, and *Polyphemus* was no more!

No more! Not dead for ever! We should be sorry to say so much; but for the time being he was dead. His soul, his motive power, had passed away; the shell remained—the powerful limbs, the once supple joints, the strong arms and cranks were now lifeless and cold! The machine remained; its mind, its spirit had departed, and it stood, enwrapped in its white winding-sheet—senseless, motionless, useless! *Polyphemus* was dead!

And his attendants—the brave men who pre-

ferred to remain on duty while the passengers departed—what of them?

They remained enveloped in snow, subsisting on the flask of brandy, and on their "teas" which they had with them. So the night passed. The day rose still stormy, and the snow still fell thickly. They took it in turns to lie in the fire-box, which still retained some heat, and subsisted how they could. The snow got deeper and deeper, the cold became more intense. They built a hut of snow, and crept into it for warmth next night, and there they fell asleep together in the drift!

* * * * *

"No; there's life yet, thank God! Bring them out quickly and carry them back at once. I will attend to them meanwhile."

A doctor was speaking. A special gang had come out and dug away at the drift. They sighted *Polyphemus*, but his attendants had disappeared! Search was made; the two faithful men were found asleep in the snow, and rescued only just in time.

None of the passengers suffered much, and after a while the train, *Polyphemus* and all, was released from its perilous position. The hero returned in funereal procession—sad, melancholy-looking, silent—with no volition of his own, dragged along by a small tank-engine, pilot fashion, to his stable!

There he was looked after and cleaned. Much attention was paid to him, and he so far recovered that in two days he was seen smoking calmly, but rather sadly, outside the shed, wondering where Eldred was, and why he did not come on as usual.

But Eldred could not come on! He and his mate had suffered very much from cold and exposure, and some days elapsed before they could go on duty

again. It is needless to say that Mrs. Eldred nursed her husband with affectionate care and solicitude all that time, and when he was able to return to duty again she cautioned him.

"Bob," she said, "I wish you'd give up the ingen and live in the country. I'm as miserable as I can be all day when you're away. Do give it up!"

"Give it up!" exclaimed Eldred. "Why, what's the' sayin'? Give up my drivin'? Look the' here! Which would the' choose? My death or the chances of my livin' as I am?"

"Why, the chances, of course, Bob; but it's so dangerous to——"

"Then, if I give up I shall die, Molly. I couldn't live—not happy—without the ingen. It's a splendid thing, and when a man loves his work why part him from it?"

"I believe you love *Polyphemus* more than me," pouted Mrs. Eldred. "Will you never give it up?"

"Not till I'm given up, lass. I love thee, I love my ingen, and I'll stick to the line as long as I can draw breath; and so long I'll stick to thee."

"Well, I'm sure you've had quite enough of accidents and adventures, and, when I can, I'll beg Mr. Overdean to make you a foreman, and keep you out o' mischief! Perhaps he will!"

"Well, lass, until he do that, me, you, and the pair of Polyphemuses will stick together! My 'evil genus' is dead; thee's my good angel, Molly, and whether drivin' or not I'll be with thee, my girl, in spirit. So don't take on. My turn isn't come yet. I does my duty, and knows my road, and we must all die some-time! It's only for once, after all!"

* * * * *

But Eldred returned to duty and to his (new)

friend, *Polyphemus*, in due time. He still drives an engine, but his old favourite was broken up, afterwards to run again in another shape — improved, and better than in old days! But their adventures, so far as we are concerned, are over! They have been seen under all circumstances. The old *Polyphemus* is no more; and so here I must reluctantly bid him, his brave companions, and my kind readers—Farewell!

THE END.



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